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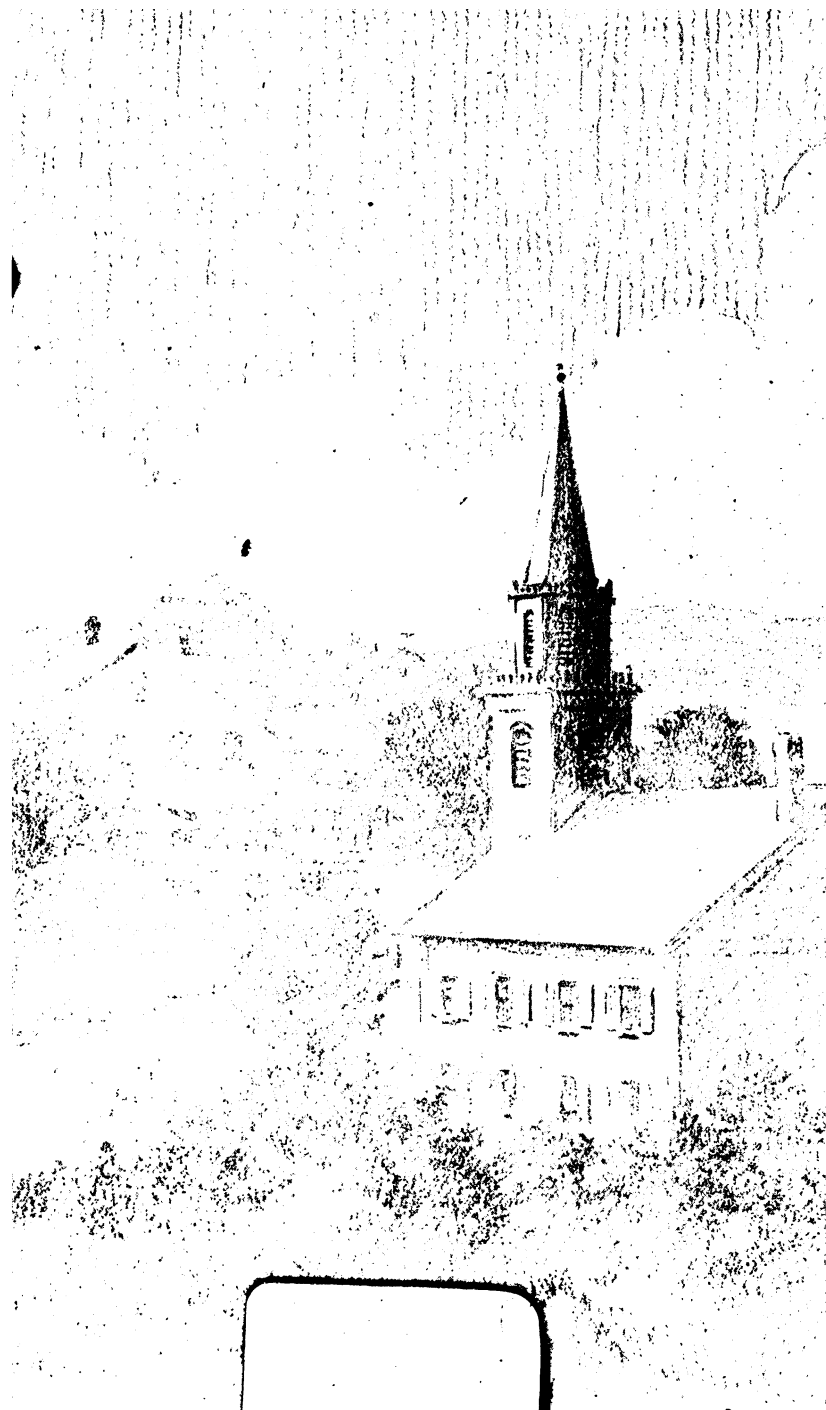
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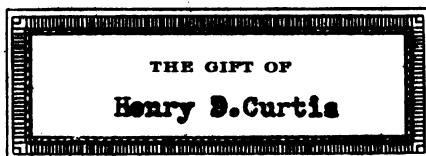
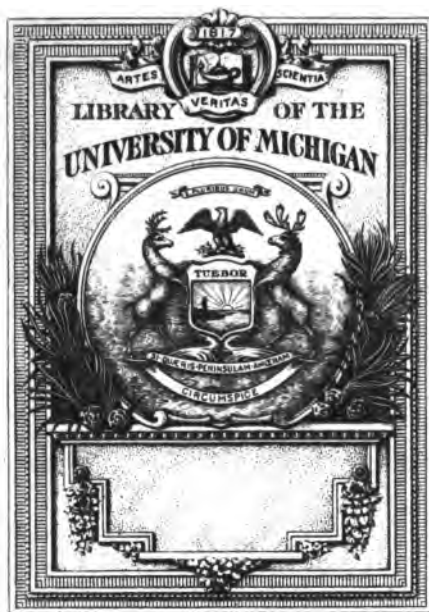
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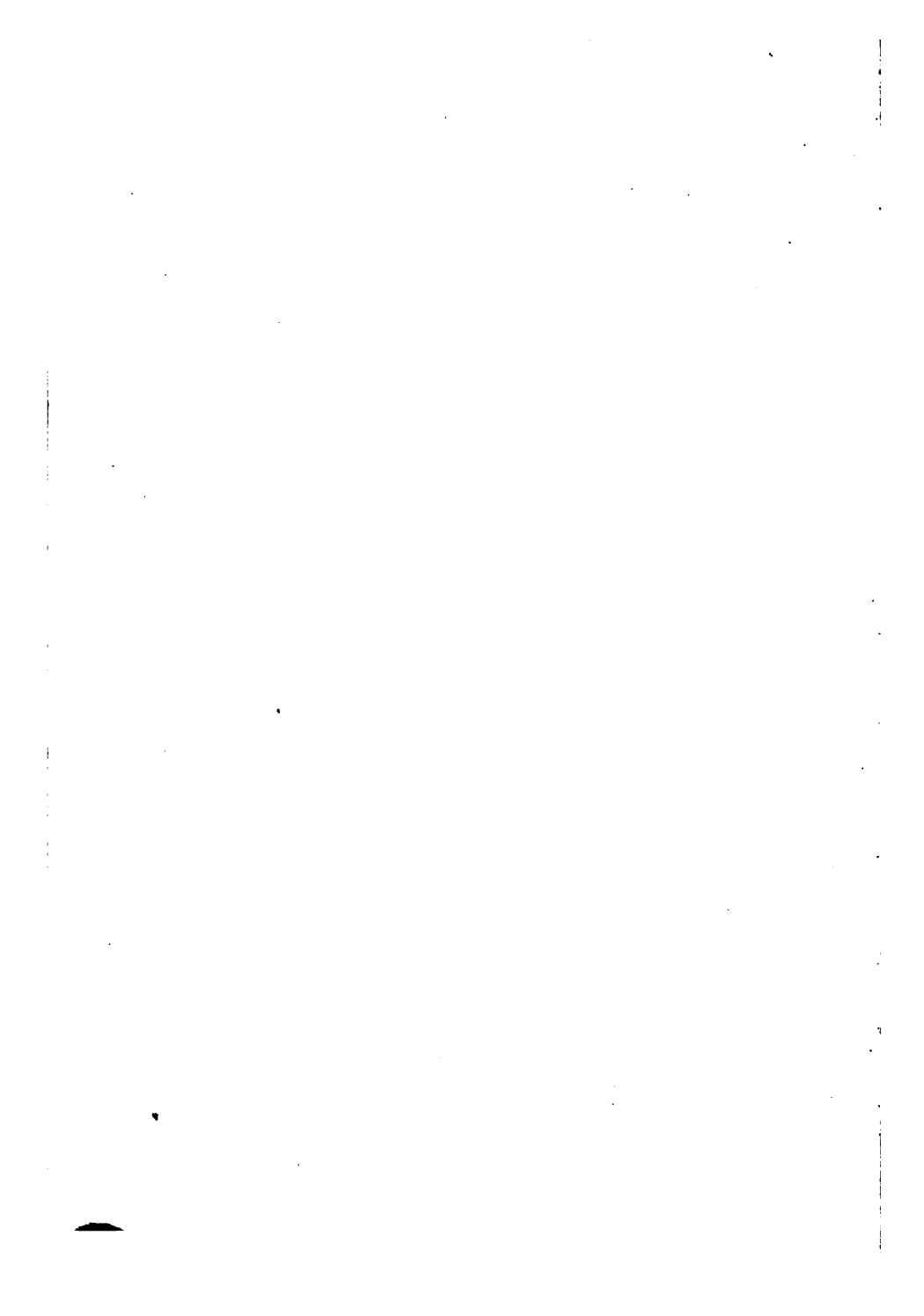
H. S. Curtis





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HOME







This, he suddenly perceived, was war

Chamberlain, George Agnew

HOME

A NOVEL

ILLUSTRATED BY
REGINALD B. BIRCH



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HOME

“ Seer, in thine eyes is wisdom and in thy silvered beard. How shall I give that which hath been given ? ”

“ My son, I read the riddle: How shalt thou paint the picture and give the eyes to see ? This is the answer. Hold thy heart in thy hand and let thy words keep time to the beat of memory. Thus shall the written page be possessed of an enduring spirit and a pervading light.”

HOME

CHAPTER I

ON an Indian summer afternoon of not very long ago Red Hill drowsed through the fleeting hours as though not only time but mills, machinery and railways were made for slaves. Hemmed in by the breathing silences of scattered woods, open fields and the far reaches of misty space, it seemed to forget that the traveler, studying New England at the opening of the twentieth century through the windows of a hurrying train, might sigh for a vanished ideal and concede the universal triumph of a commercial age.

For such a one Red Hill held locked a message, and the key to the lock was the message itself: "Turn your back on the paralleled rivers and railroads and plunge into the byways that lead into the eternal hills and you will find the world that was and still is."

Let such a traveler but follow a lane that leads up through willow and elderberry, sassafras, laurel, wild cherry and twining clematis; a lane aligned with slender wood-maples, hickory and mountain-ash and flanked where it gains the open with scattered juniper and oak, and he will come out at last on the scenes of a country's childhood.

At right angles to the lane, a broad way, cutting the

length of the hill, and losing itself in a dip at each end toward the valleys and the new world. The broad way is shaded by one of two trees—the domed maple or the stately elm. At the summit of its rise stands an old church whose green shutters blend with the caressing foliage of primeval trees. Its white walls and towering steeple dominate the scene. White, too, are the scattered houses that gleam from behind the verdure of unbroken lawns and shrubbery, white all but one, whose time-stained brick glows blood-red against the black-green of clinging ivy.

Not all these homes are alive. Here a charred beam tells the story of a fire, there a mound of trailing vines tenderly hides from view the shame of a ruin, and there again stands a tribute to the power of the new age—a house whose shutters are closed and barred; white now only in patches, its scaling walls have taken on the dull gray of neglected pine.

For generations these houses have sent out men, for generations they have taken them back. Their cupboards guard trophies from the seven seas paid for with the Yankee nutmeg, swords wrought from plowshares and christened with the blood of the oppressor, a long line of collegiate sheepskins, and last, but by no means least, recipes whose faded ink and brittle paper sum the essence of ages of culinary wisdom.

Some of these clustered homes live the year round at full swing but the life of some is cut down in the winter to a minimum only to spring up afresh in summer like the new stalk from a treasured bulb. Of such was the little kingdom of Red Hill.

Red Hill was very still on this Indian summer afternoon as though it were in hiding from the railroads, mills and highways of an age of hurry. Upon its long, level crest it bore but three centers of life and a symbol: Maple House, The Firs and Elm House, half hidden from the road by their distinctive trees but as alive as the warm eyes of a veiled woman; and the church.

The church was but a symbol—a mere shell. Within, it presented the appearance of a lumber room in disuse, a playground for rats and a haven for dust. But without, all was as it had ever been; for the old church was still beloved. Its fresh white walls and green shutters and the aspiring steeple, towering into the blue, denied neglect and robbed abandonment of its sting.

In the shadow of its walls lay an old graveyard whose overgrown soil had long been undisturbed. Along the single road which cut the crest of the Hill from north to south were ruins of houses that once had sheltered the scattered congregation. But the ruins were hard to find for they too were overgrown by juniper, clematis and a crowding thicket of mountain-ash.

On these evidences of death and encroachment the old church seemed to turn its back as if by right of its fresh walls and unbroken steeple it were still linked to life. Through its small-paned windows it seemed to gaze contentedly across the road at the three houses, widely separated, that half faced it in a diminishing perspective. The three houses looked towards the sunrise; the church towards its decline.

The supper call had sounded and the children's answering cries had ceased. Along the ribbon of the single road scurried an overlaid donkey. Three lengths of legs bobbed at varying angles from her fat sides. Behind her hurried a nurse, aghast for the hundredth time at the donkey's agility, never demonstrated except at the evening hour.

Halfway between Maple House and The Firs stood two bare-legged boys working their toes into the impalpable dust of the roadway and rubbing the grit into their ankles in a final orgy of dirt before the evening wash. They called derisively to the donkey load of children, bound to bed with the setting sun.

On the veranda of Elm House an old man in shirt sleeves sat whittling on to a mat, especially laid at his feet. Beside the fluted pillars of the high portico he looked very small. The big, still house and the tall elms that crowded the lawn seemed to brood over him as though they knew that he was not only small but young — merely one of the many generations of Eltons they had mothered and sheltered through the long years that make light of a single life.

From the barn behind the house came the slam of the oat-bin and a sudden chorus of eager whinnies. The whinnies were answered from the roadway. The old man looked up. A wagonette appeared over the brow of Red Hill. It was drawn by two lean, well-conditioned bays whose long, quick stride reached out for stables and oats. The wagonette was crowded. The old man answered cries and waving hands and his eyes followed the bays down the road and twinkled as they

saw the wagonette swerve and plow through the grass, surrendering the right of way to the fat donkey.

At The Firs, home of the Lansings even before the Eltons had come to Elm House, the veranda was vacant; but a big chair was still slowly rocking. Beside it lay a pile of snowy sewing, hastily dropped. An overturned work-basket disgorged a tangled medley of skeins, needles, pins and scraps. A fugitive thimble described a wide circle and brought up against one of the veranda posts. From the distant kitchen came the smell of something burning.

At Elm House and The Firs there was life and peace but down the road at Maple House, home of the Waynes, life reigned alone on this autumn evening. With the arrival of the wagonette and its load, all was commotion. A stable-hand ran out to take charge of the bays. Excited children left their supper and insisted on being kissed all around by the newcomers. Youth called to age and age laughed back. A hostess with quiet eyes dispensed welcome, playfully affectionate to returning members of the family, seriously cordial to the stranger within the gates. Then she slipped away to speak a word to the kitchen and to glance over the great table in the dining-room, for to-night Eltons, Lansings and Waynes were to dine at a single board.

They gathered twenty strong, a sturdy lot. From old Captain Wayne to little Clematis McAlpin, promoted for a night from the children's table, they bore the stamp of fighters, veterans and veterans to be. Life had marked the faces of the men and time had mellowed the faces of the women. In the cheeks of

the young color glowed and in their eyes a fire burned. Life challenged them. Their spirits were eager to take up the gage.

On Red Hill the mountain-ash thicket that gave the place its name, was in its full glory. Its carmine flame called defiance at the disappearing sun. The old white church caught the fiery light of the sun in the small panes of its windows and sent back a message too, across the valleys and over the hills, but there was no defiance in it — only a cry to the world that the old church still stood.

Night fell on the Hill. The stars came out and with them a glow of light and warmth lit up the windows of Maple House, Elm House and The Firs. A smell of hot biscuit lingered in the still air. The soft voices of women hushing children to sleep came like the breath of life from the quiet houses.

Here a song, sifting softly through the rustle of many trees, there the crying, quickly hushed, of a frightened, wakened baby, and far up the road, the trailing whistle of a boy signaling good-night, passed into the silence. Lastly the moon burst over the ridge of East Mountain and in the path of its soft light the old church stole back into the picture.

CHAPTER II

AUTUMN passed and winter, then on a day in early spring Alan Wayne was summoned to Red Hill. Snow still hung in the crevices of East Mountain. On the Hill the ashes, after the total eclipse of winter, were meekly donning pale green. The elms of Elm House too were but faintly outlined in verdure and stood like empty sherry glasses waiting for warm wine. Further down the road the maples stretched out bare, black limbs whose budding tufts of leaves served only to emphasize the nakedness of the trees. Only the firs, in a phalanx, scoffed at the general spring cleaning and looked old and sullen in consequence.

The colts, driven by Alan Wayne, flashed over the brim of Red Hill on to the level top. Coachman Joe's jaw was hanging in awe and so had hung since Mr. Alan had taken the reins. For the first time in their five years of equal life the colts had felt the cut of a whip, not in anger but as a reproof for breaking. Coachman Joe had braced himself for the bolt, his hands itching to snatch the reins. But there had been no bolting, only a sudden settling down to business.

For the first time in their lives the colts were being pushed, steadily, evenly, almost — but never quite — to the breaking point. Twice in the long drive Joe

gathered up his jaw and turned his head, preparing spoken tribute to a master hand. But there was no speaking to Mr. Alan's face. At that moment Joe was a part of the seat to Mr. Alan and, being a coachman of long standing in the family, he knew it.

"Could n't of got here quicker if he 'd let 'em bolt," said he, in subsequent description to the stable-hand and the cook. He snatched up a pail of water and poured it steadily on the ground. "Jest like that. He knew what was in the colts the minute he laid hands on 'em and when he pulls 'em up at the barn door there was n't a drop left in their buckets, was there, Arthur?"

"Nary a drop," said Arthur, stable-hand.

"And his face," continued the coachman. "Most times Mr. Alan has no eyes to speak of, but to-day and that time Miss Nance stuck him with the hatpin — 'member, cook? — his eyes spread like a fire and eat up his face. This is a black day for the Hill. Something's going to happen. You mark me."

In truth Mr. Alan Wayne had been summoned in no equivocal terms and, for all his haste, it was with nervous step he approached the house.

There was no den, no sanctuary beyond a bedroom, for any one at Maple House. No one brought work to Red Hill save such work as fitted into swinging hammocks and leafy bowers. Library opened into living-room and hall, hall into drawing-room and drawing-room into the cool shadows and high lights of half-hidden mahogany and china closets. And here and there and everywhere doors opened out on to the

Hill. A place where summer breezes entered freely and played, sure of a way out. Hence it was that Maple House as a whole became a tomb on that memorable spring morning when the colts first felt a master hand — a tomb where Wayne history was to be made and buried as it had been before.

Maple House sheltered a mixed brood. J. Y. Wayne, seconded by Mrs. J. Y., was the head of the family. Their daughter, Nance Sterling, and her babies represented the direct line, but the orphans, Alan Wayne and Clematis McAlpin, were on an equal footing as children of the house. Alan was the only child of J. Y.'s dead brother. Clematis was also of Wayne blood but so intricately removed that her exact relation to the rest of the tribe was never figured out twice to the same conclusion. Old Captain Wayne, retired from the regular army, was an uncle in a different degree to every generation of Waynes. He was the only man on Red Hill who dared call for a whisky and soda when he wanted it.

When Alan reached the house Mrs. J. Y. was in her garden across the road, surveying winter's ruin, and Nance with her children had borne the Captain off to the farm to see that oft-repeated wonder and always welcome forerunner of plenty, the quite new calf.

Clematis McAlpin, shy and long-limbed, just at the awkward age when woman misses being either boy or girl, had disappeared. Where, nobody knew. She might be bird's-nesting in the swamp or crying over the "Idylls of the King" in the barn loft. Certainly she was not in the house. J. Y. Wayne had seen to

that. Stern and rugged of face he sat in the library alone and waited for Alan. He heard a distant screen-door open and slam. Steps echoed through the lonely house. Alan came and stood before him.

Alan was a man. Without being tall, he looked tall. His shoulders were not broad till you noticed the slimness of his hips. His neck looked too thin till you saw the strong set of his small head. In a word he had the perfect proportion that looks frail and is strong. As he stood before his uncle, his eyes grew dull. They were slightly blood-shot in the corners and with their dullness the clear-cut lines of his face seemed to take on a perceptible blur.

J. Y. began to speak. He spoke for a long quarter of an hour and then summed up all he had said in a few words. "I've been no uncle to you, Alan, I've been a father. I've tried to win you but you were not to be won. I've tried to hold you but it takes more than a Wayne to hold a Wayne. You have taken the bit with a vengeance. You have left such a wreckage behind you that we can trace your life back to the cradle by your failures, all the greater for your many successes. You're the first Wayne that ever missed his college degree. I never asked what they expelled you for and I don't want to know. It must have been bad, bad, for the old school is lenient, and proud of men that stand as high as you stood in your classes and on the field. Money—I won't talk of money, for you thought it was your own."

For the first time Alan spoke. "What do you mean, sir?" With the words his slight form

straightened, his eyes blazed, there was a slight quivering of the thin nostrils and his features came out clear and strong.

J. Y. dropped his eyes. "I may have been wrong, Alan," he said slowly, "but I've been your banker without telling you. Your father did n't leave much. It saw you through Junior year."

Alan placed his hands on the desk between them and leaned forward. "How much have I spent since then — in the last three years?"

J. Y. kept his eyes down. "You know, more or less, Alan. We won't talk about that. I was trying to hold you. But to-day I give it up. I've got one more thing to tell you, though, and there are mighty few people that know it. The Hill's battles have never entered the field of gossip. Seven years before you were born, my father — your grandfather — turned me out. It was from this room. He said I had started the name of Wayne on the road to shame and that I could go with it. He gave me five hundred dollars. I took it and went. I sank low with the name but in the end I brought it back and to-day it stands high on both sides of the water. I'm not a happy man, as you know, for all that. You see, though I brought the name back in the end, I never saw your grandfather again and he never knew.

"Here are five hundred dollars. It's the last money you'll ever have from me but whatever you do, whatever happens, remember this: Red Hill does not belong to a Lansing nor to a Wayne nor to an Elton. It is the eternal mother of us all. Broken or mended,

Lansings and Waynes have come back to the Hill through generations. City of refuge or harbor of peace, it's all one to the Hill. Remember that."

He laid the crisp notes on the desk. Alan half turned toward the door but stepped back again. His eyes and face were dull once more. He picked up the bills and slowly counted them. "I shall return the money, sir," he said and walked out.

He went to the stables and ordered the pony and cart for the afternoon train. As he came out he saw Nance, the children and the Captain coming slowly up Long Lane from the farm. He dodged back into the barn through the orchard and across the lawn. Mrs. J. Y. stood in the garden directing the relaying of flower-beds. Alan made a circuit. As he stepped into the road, swift steps came towards him. He wheeled and faced Clem coming at full run. He turned his back on her and started away. The swift steps stopped so suddenly that he looked around. Clem was standing stock-still, one awkward lanky leg half crooked as though it were still running. Her skirts were absurdly short. Her little fists, brown and scratched, pressed her sides. Her dark hair hung in a tangled mat over a thin, pointed face. Her eyes were large and shadowy. Two tears had started from them and were crawling down soiled cheeks. She was quivering all over like a woman struck.

Alan swung around and strode up to her. He put one arm about her thin form and drew her to him. "Don't cry, Clem," he said, "don't cry. I did n't mean to hurt you."

For one moment she clung to him and buried her face against his coat. Then she looked up and smiled through wet eyes. "Alan, I'm so glad you've come!"

Alan caught her hand and together they walked down the road to the old church. The great door was locked. Alan loosened the fastening of a shutter, sprang in through the window and drew Clem after him. They climbed to the belfry. From the belfry one saw the whole world with Red Hill as its center. Alan was disappointed. The Hill was still half naked — almost bleak. Maple House and Elm House shone brazenly white through budding trees. They looked as if they had crawled closer to the road during the winter. The Firs, with its black border of last year's foliage, looked funereal. Alan turned from the scene but Clem's little hand drew him back.

Clematis McAlpin had happened between generations. Alan, Nance, Gerry Lansing and their friends had been too old for her and Nance's children were too young. There were Elton children of about her age but for years they had been abroad. Consequently Clem had grown to fifteen in a sort of loneliness not uncommon with single children who can just remember the good times the half-generation before them used to have by reason of their numbers. This loneliness had given her in certain ways a precocious development while it left her subdued and shy even when among her familiars. But she was shy without fear and her shyness itself had a flower-like sweetness that made a bold appeal.

"Isn't it wonderful, Alan?" she said. "Yester-

day it was cold and it rained and the Hill was black, *black*, like The Firs. To-day all the trees are fuzzy with green and it's warm. Yesterday was so lonely and to-day you are here."

Alan looked down at the child with glowing eyes.

"And do you know, this summer Gerry Lansing and Mrs. Gerry are coming. I've never seen her since that day they were married. Do you think it's all right for me to call her Mrs. Gerry like everybody does?"

Alan considered the point gravely. "Yes, I think that's the best thing you could call her."

"Perhaps when I'm really grown up I can call her Alix. I think Alix is such a *pretty* name, don't you?"

Clem flashed a look at Alan and he nodded; then, with an impulsive movement she drew close to him in the half-wheedling way of woman about to ask a favor. "Alan, they let me ride old Dubbs when he is n't plowing. The old donkey—she's so fat now she can hardly carry the babies. Some day when you're not in a *great* hurry will you let me ride with you?"

Alan turned away briskly and started down the ladder. "Some day, perhaps, Clem," he muttered. "Not this summer. Come on." When they had left the church he drew out his watch and started. "Run along and play, Clem." He left her and hurried to the barn.

Joe was waiting. "Have we time for the long road, Joe?" asked Alan, as he climbed into the cart.

"Oh, yes, sir, especially if you drive, Mr. Alan."

"I don't want to drive. Let him go and jump in."

The coachman gave the pony his head, climbed in and took the reins. The cart swung out and down the lane.

"Alan! Alan!"

Alan recognized Clem's voice and turned. She was racing across a corner of the pasture. Her short skirts flounced madly above her ungainly legs. She tried to take the low stone wall in her stride. Her foot caught in a vine and she pitched headlong into the weeds and grass at the roadside.

Alan leaped from the cart and picked her up, quivering, sobbing and breathless. "Alan," she gasped, "you're not going away?"

Alan half shook her as he drew her thin body close to him. "Clem," he said, "you must n't. Do you hear? You must n't. Do you think I want to go away?"

Clem stifled her sobs and looked up at him with a sudden gravity in her elfish face. She threw her bare arms around his neck. "Good-by, Alan."

He stooped and kissed her.

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He stooped and kissed her.

CHAPTER III

IF Alix Deering had not barked her pretty shins against the centerboard in Gerry Lansing's sailing boat on West Lake it is possible that she would in the end have married Alan Wayne instead of Gerry Lansing.

When two years before Alan's dismissal Nance had brought Alix, an old school friend, to Red Hill for a fortnight, everybody had thought what a splendid match Alix and Alan would make. But it happened that Alan was very much taken up at the time with memory and anticipation of a certain soubrette and before he awoke to Alix's wealth of charms the incident of the shins robbed him of opportunity.

Gerry, dressed only in a bathing suit, his boat running free before a brisk breeze, had swerved to graze The Point, where half of Red Hill was encamped, when he caught sight of a figure lying prone on the outermost flat rock. He took it to be Nance. "Jump!" he yelled as the boat neared the rock.

The figure started, scrambled to its feet and sprang. It was Alix, still half asleep, that landed on the slightly canted floor of the boat. Her shins brought up with a thwack against the centerboard and she fell in a heap at Gerry's feet. Her face went white and strained,

for a second she bit her lip and then, "I *must* cry," she gasped, — and cried.

Gerry was big, strong and placid. Action came slowly to him but when it came it was sure. He threw one knee over the tiller and gathered Alix into his arms. She lay like a hurt child, sobbing against his shoulder. "Poor little girl," he said, "I know how it hurts. Cry now because in a minute it will all be over. It will, dear. Shins are like that." And then, before she could master her sobs and take in the unconscious humor of his comfort, the boat struck with a crash on Hidden Rock.

The nearest Gerry had ever come to drowning was when he had fallen asleep lying on his back in the middle of West Lake. Even with a frightened girl clinging to him it gave him no shock to find himself in the water a quarter of a mile from shore. But with Alix it was different. She gasped and in consequence gulped down a large mouthful of the Lake. Then she broke into hysterical laughter and swallowed some more. Gerry held her up and deliberately slapped her across the mouth. In a flash anger sobered her. Her eyes blazed. "You coward," she whispered.

Gerry's face was white and stern. "Put one hand on my shoulder and kick with your feet," he said. "I'll tow you to shore."

"Put me on Hidden Rock," said Alix; "I prefer to wait for a boat."

"It will take an hour for a boat to get here," answered Gerry. "I'm going to tow you in. If you say another word I shall slap you again."

In a dead silence they plowed slowly to shore and when Gerry found bottom he stood up, took Alix into his arms and strode well up the bank before he set her down.

During the long swim she had had time to think but not to forgive. She stamped her sodden feet, shook out her skirts and then looked Gerry up and down. Gerry with his crisp light hair; blue eyes, wide apart and well open; and six feet of well-proportioned bulk, was good to look at but Alix's angry eyes did not admit it. They measured him scornfully but it was not the look that hurt him so much as the way she turned from him with a little shrug of dismissal and started along the shore for camp.

Gerry reached out and caught hold of her arm. She swung around, her face quite white. "I see," she said in a low voice. "You want it now."

Gerry held her with his eyes. "Yes," he answered, "I want it now."

"Why did you yell at me to jump into your horrible boat?"

"I took you for Nance."

"You took me for Nance," repeated Alix with a mimicry and in a tone that left no doubt as to the fact that she was in a nasty temper.

"And *why*," she went on, her eyes blazing and her slight figure trembling, "did you strike me—slap me across the face?"

"Because I love you," replied Gerry steadily.

"Oh!" gasped Alix. Her gray-slate eyes went wide open in unfeigned amazement and suddenly the tense-

ness that is the essence of attack went out of her body. Instead of a self-possessed and very angry young woman she became her natural self — a girl fluttering before her first really thrilling situation.

There was something so childlike in her sudden transition that Gerry was moved out of himself. For once he was not slow. He caught hold of her and drew her towards him.

But Alix was not to be plucked like a ripe plum. She freed herself gently but firmly and stood facing him. Then she smiled and with the smile she gained the upper hand. Gerry suddenly became awkward and painfully conscious of his bare arms and legs. He felt exceptionally naked.

"When did it begin?" murmured Alix.

"What?" said Gerry.

"It," said Alix. "When — how long have you loved me?"

Gerry's face turned a deep red but he raised his eyes steadily to hers. "It began," he said simply, "when I took you in my arms and you laid your face against my shoulder and cried like — like a little kid."

"Oh!" said Alix again and blushed in her turn. She had lost the upper hand and knew it. Gerry's arms went around her and this time she raised her face and let him kiss her.

"Now," she said as they started for the camp, "I suppose I must call you Gerry."

"Yes," said Gerry solemnly. "And I shall call you Little Miss Oh!"

So casual an engagement might easily have come to

a casual end but Gerry Lansing was quietly tenacious. Once moved he stayed moved. No woman had ever stirred him before; he did not imagine that any other woman would ever stir him again.

To Alix, once the shock of finding herself engaged was passed, came full realization and a certain amount of level-headed calculation. She knew herself to be high-strung, nervous and impulsive, a combination that led people to consider her flighty. On the day of the wreck Gerry had shown himself to be a man full grown. He had mastered her; she thought he could hold her.

Then came calculation. Alix was out of the West. All that money could do for her in the way of education and culture had been done but no one knew better than she that her culture was a mere veneer in comparison with the ingrained flower of the Lansings' family oak. Here was a man she could love and with him he brought her the old homestead on Red Hill and an older brown stone front in New York whose position was as awkward as it was socially unassailable. Alix reflected that if there was a fool to the bargain it was not she.

All Red Hill and a few Deerings gathered for the wedding and many were the remarks passed on Gerry's handsome bulk and Alix's scintillating beauty but the only saying that went down in history came from Alan Wayne when Nance, just a little troubled over the combination of Gerry and Alix, asked him what he thought of it.

Alan's eyes narrowed and his thin lips curved into a smile as he gave his verdict: "Andromeda, consenting, chained to the rock."

CHAPTER IV

TO the surprise of his friends Alan Wayne gave up debauch and found himself employment by the time the spring that saw his dismissal from Maple House had ripened into summer. He was full of preparation for his departure for Africa when a summons from old Captain Wayne reached him.

With equal horror of putting up at hotels or relatives' houses, the Captain upon his arrival in town had gone straight to his club and forthwith become the sensation of the club's windows. Old members felt young when they caught sight of him as though they had come suddenly on a vanished landmark restored. Passing gamins gazed on his short-cropped gray hair, staring eyes, flaring collar, black string tie and flowing broadcloth and remarked, "Gee, look at de old spoit in de winder!"

Alan heard the remark as he entered the club and smiled.

"How do you do, sir?"

"Huh!" grunted the Captain. "Sit down." He ordered a drink for his guest and another for himself. He glared at the waiter. He glared at a callow youth who had come up and was looking with speculative eye at a neighboring chair. The waiter retired almost precipitously. The youth followed.

"In my time," remarked the Captain, "a club was for privacy. Now it's a haven for bell-boys and a playground for whippersnappers."

"They've made me a member, sir."

"Have, eh!" growled the Captain and glared at his nephew. Alan took inspection coolly, a faint smile on his thin face. The Captain turned away his bulging eyes, crossed and uncrossed his legs and finally spoke. "I was just going to say when you interrupted," he began, "that engineering is a dirty job. Not, however," he continued, after a pause, "dirtier than most. It's a profession but not a career."

"Oh, I don't know," said Alan. "They've got a few in the Army and they seem to be doing pretty well."

"Huh, the Army!" said the Captain. He subsided, and made a new start. "What's your appointment?"

"It does n't amount to an appointment. Just a job as assistant to Walton, the engineer the contractors are sending out. We're going to put up a bridge somewhere in Africa."

"That's it. I knew it," said the Captain. "Going away. Want any money?"

The question came like solid shot out of a four-pounder. Alan started, colored and smiled, all at the same time.

"No thanks, sir," he replied, "I've got all I need."

The Captain hitched his chair forward, placed his hands on his knees, leaned forward and glared out on the Avenue. "The Lansings," he began, like a boy

reciting a piece, "are devils for drink, the Waynes for women. Don't you ever let 'em worry you about drink. Nowadays the doctors call us non-alcoholic. In my time it was just plain strong heads for wine. I say, don't worry about drink. There's a safety valve in every Wayne's gullet.

"But women, Alan!" The Captain slued around his bulging eyes. "You look out for them. As your greatgrandfather used to say, 'To women, only perishable goods — sweets, flowers and kisses.' And you take it from me, kisses are n't always the cheapest. They say God made everything — down to little apples and Jersey lightning. But when he made women the devil helped." The Captain's nervousness dropped from him as he deliberately drew out his watch and fob. "Good thing he did too," he added, as a pleasing afterthought. He leaned back in his chair. A complacent look came over his face.

Alan got up to say good-by. The Captain rose too and clasped the hand Alan held out. "One more thing," he said. "Don't forget there's always a Wayne to back a Wayne for good or bad." There was a suspicion of moisture in his eye as he hurried his guest off.

Back in his rooms Alan found letters awaiting him. He read them and tore them up — all but one. It was from Clem. "Dear Alan," she wrote, "Nance says you are going very far away. I am sorry. It has been raining here very much. In the hollows all the bridges are under water. I have invented a new game. It is called 'steamboat.' I play it on old Dubbs. We go

down into the valley and I make him go through the water around the bridges. He puffs just like a steamboat and when he gets out he smokes all over. He is *too fat*. I hope you will come back very soon. Clem."

That evening Clem was thrown into a transport by receiving her first telegram. It read, "You must not play steamboat again, it is dangerous. Alan." She tucked it in her bosom and rushed over to The Firs to show it to Gerry.

Gerry and Alix were spending the summer at The Firs where Mrs. Lansing, Gerry's widowed mother, was still nominally the hostess. They had been married two years but people still spoke of Alix as Gerry's bride and in so doing stamped her with her own seal. To strangers they carried the air of a couple about to be married at the rational close of a long engagement. No children or thought of children had come to turn the channel of life for Alix. On Gerry, marriage sat as an added habit. It was beginning to look as though he and Alix drifted together not because they were carried by the same currents but because they were tied.

Where duller minds would have dubbed Gerry the Ox, Alan had named him the Rock, and Alan was right. Gerry had a dignity beyond mere bulk. He had all the powers of resistance, none of articulation. Where a pin-prick would start an ox it took an upheaval to move Gerry. An upheaval was on the way but Gerry did not know it. It was yet afar off.

To the Lansings marriage had always been one of the regular functions of a regulated life — part of the gen-

eral scheme of things. Gerry was slowly realizing that his marriage with Alix was far from a mere function, had little to do with a regular life and was foreign to what he had always considered the general scheme of things. Alix had developed, quite naturally, into a social butterfly. Gerry did not picture her as chain lightning playing on a rock as Alan would have done, but he did, in a vague way, feel that bits of his impulsive self were being chipped away.

Red Hill bored Alix and she showed it. The first summer after the marriage they had spent abroad. Now Alix's thoughts and talk turned constantly toward Europe. She even suggested a flying trip for the fall but Gerry refused to be dragged so far from golf and his club. He stuck doggedly to Red Hill till the leaves began to turn and then consented to move back to town.

On their last night at The Firs Mrs. Lansing, who was complimentary Aunt Jane to Waynes and Eltons, entertained Red Hill as a whole to dinner. With the arrival of dessert to Alix's surprise Nance said, "Port all around, please, Aunt Jane."

Lansings, Waynes and Eltons were heavy drinkers in town but it was a tradition, as Alix knew, that on Red Hill they dropped it — all but the old Captain. It was as though, amid the scenes of their childhood, they became children and just as a Frenchman of the old school will not light a cigarette in the presence of his father so they would not take a drink for drink's sake on Red Hill.

So Alix looked on interestedly as the old butler set glasses and started the port. When it had gone the

round Nance stood up and with her hands on the table's edge, leaned towards them all. For a Wayne, she was very fair. As they looked at her the color swept up over her bare neck. Its wave reached her temples and seemed to stir the clustering tendrils of her hair. Her eyes were grave and bright with moisture. Her lips were tremulous. "We drink to Alan," she said, "to-day is Alan's birthday."

She sat down. They all raised their glasses. Little Clem had no wine. She put a thin hand on Gerry's arm.

"Please, Gerry, please!"

Gerry held down his glass. Clematis dipped in the tip of her little finger and as they all drank, gravely carried the drop of wine to her lips.

CHAPTER V

AS Judge Healey, gray-haired but erect, walked up the Avenue his keen glance fell on Gerry Lansing standing across the street before an art dealer's window. Gerry's eyes were fastened on a picture that he had long had in mind for a certain nook in the library of the town house.

It was the second anniversary of his wedding and though it was already late in the afternoon Gerry had not yet chosen his gift for Alix. He turned from the picture with a last long look and a shrug and passed on to a palatial jeweler's further up the street.

For many years Judge Healey had been foster-father to Red Hill in general and to Gerry in particular. With almost womanly intuition he read what was in Gerry's mind before the picture and acting on impulse the Judge crossed the street and bought it.

While the Judge was still in the picture shop Gerry came out of the jeweler's and started briskly for home. He had purchased a pendant of brilliants, extravagant for his purse but yet saved to good taste by a simple originality in design.

He waited until the dinner hour and then slipped his gift into Alix's hand as they walked down the stairs together. She stopped beneath the hall light. "I can't wait dear, I simply can't." She snapped open the case.

"Oh!" she gasped. "How dear! How perfectly dear! You old sweetheart!" She threw her arms around his neck and kissed him twice. Then she flew away to the drawing-room in search of Mrs. Lansing and the Judge, the sole guests to the little anniversary dinner. Gerry straightened his tie and followed.

Alix's tongue was rippling — her whole body was rippling — with excitement and pleasure. She dangled her treasure before their eyes. She laid it against her warm neck and ran to a mirror. The light in her eyes matched the light in the stones. The Judge took the jewel and laid it in the palm of his strong hand. It looked in danger of being crushed. "A beautiful thing, Gerry," he said, "and well chosen. Some poet jeweler dreamed that twining design and set the stones while the dew was still on the grass."

After dinner the four gathered in the library but they were hardly seated when Alix sprang up. Her glance had followed Gerry's startled gaze. He was staring at the coveted picture he had been looking at in the gallery that afternoon. It hung in the niche in which his thoughts had placed it. Alix took her stand before it. She glanced inquiringly at the others. Mrs. Lansing nodded at the Judge. Alix turned back to the picture and gravity stole into her face. Then she faced the Judge with a smile.

"We live," she said, "in a Philistine age, don't we? But I've never let my Philistinism drive pictures from their right place in the heart. Pictures in art galleries —" she shrugged her pretty shoulders — "I have not been trained up to them. To me, they are mounted

butterflies in a museum, cut flowers crowded at the florist's. But this picture and that nook — they have waited for each other. You see the picture nestling down for a long rest and it seems a small thing and then it catches your eye and holds it and you see that it is a little door that opens on a wide world. It has slipped into the room and become a part of life."

A strange stillness followed on Alix's words. To the Judge and to Gerry it was as though the picture had opened a window to her mind. Then she closed the window. "Come, Gerry," she said, turning. "Make your bow to the Judge and bark."

Gerry was excited though he did not show it. "You have dressed my thoughts in words I can't equal," he said and strolled out on to the little veranda at the back of the house. He wanted to be alone for a moment and think over this flash of light that had followed a dark day. For the first time in a long while Alix had revealed herself. He did not begrudge the Judge his triumph. He knew instinctively that coming from him instead of from the Judge the picture would not have struck that intimate spark.

The next day Gerry gave his consent to Alix's plan for a flying trip abroad but with a reservation. The reservation was that she should join some party and leave him behind.

Judge Healey heard of this arrangement only when it was on the point of being put into effect. In fact he was only just in time at the steamer to wave goodbye to Alix. Leaning over the rail, with her high color, moist red lips and big excited eyes making play under

a golden crown of hair and over a huge armful of roses, Alix presented a picture not easily forgotten.

The Judge turned to Gerry. "She ought not to be going without you, my boy."

"Oh, it's all right," said Gerry lightly. "She's well chaperoned. It's a big party, you know."

But during the weeks that followed the Judge saw it was not all right. Gerry had less and less time for golf and more and more for whiskys and sodas. The Judge was troubled and felt a sort of relief when from far away Alan Wayne cropped into his affairs and gave him something else to think about.

When Angus McDale of McDale & McDale called without appointment the Judge knew at once that he was going to hear something about Alan.

"Lucky to find you in," puffed McDale. "It is n't business exactly or I'd have 'phoned. I was just passing by."

"Well, what is it?" asked the Judge, offering his visitor a fresh cigar.

"It's this. That boy, Alan Wayne — sort of protégé of yours, is n't he?"

"Yes — in a way — yes," said the Judge slowly, frowning. "What has Alan done now?"

"It's like this," said McDale. "Six months ago we sent Mr. Wayne out on contract as assistant to Walton. Walton no sooner got on the ground than he fell sick. He put Wayne in charge and then he died. Now this is the point. Mr. Wayne seems to have promoted himself to Walton's pay. He had the cheek to draw his own as well. He won't be here for weeks but his ac-

counts came in to-day. I want to know if you see any reason why we should n't have that money back, to say the least."

The Judge's face cleared. "Did n't he tell you why he drew Walton's pay?"

"Not a word. Said he'd explain accounts when he got here but that sort of thing takes a lot of explaining."

"Well," said the Judge, "I can tell you. Walton's pay went to his widow through me. I've been doing some puzzling on this case already. Now will you tell me how Alan got the money without drawing on you?"

"Oh, there was plenty of money lying around. The job cost ten per cent. less than Walton's estimate. If he'd come back we'd have hauled him over the coals for that blunder. There was the usual reserve for work in inaccessible regions and then the people we did the job for paid ten days' bonus for finishing that much ahead of contract time."

The Judge mused. "Was the job satisfactory to the people out there?" he asked.

"Yes, it was," said McDale bluntly. "Most satisfactory. But there was a funny thing there too. They wrote that while they did not approve of Mr. Wayne's time-saving methods, the finished work had their absolute acceptance."

The Judge was silent for a moment. "You want my advice?"

"Yes, not for our own sake but for Wayne's."

"Well," said the Judge, "I'm going to give it to you for your sake. When you stumble across a boy

that can cut ten per cent. off the working and time estimates of an old hand like Walton, you bind him to you with a long contract at any salary he wants. And just one thing more: when Alan Wayne steals a cent from you or fifty thousand dollars you come to me and I'll pay it."

McDale's eyes narrowed and he puffed nervously at his cigar. He got up to take his leave. "Judge," he said, "your head is on right and your heart's in the right place, as well. I begin to see that widow business. Wayne sized us up for a hard-headed firm when it comes to paying out what we don't have to and we are. It was n't law but he was right. Walton's work was done just as if he'd been alive. Even a Scotchman can see that. You need n't worry. A man that you'll back for fifty thousand is good enough for McDale & McDale."

CHAPTER VI

IT was Alix that discovered Alan as the *Elenic* steamed slowly down the Solent. He was already comfortably established in his chair with a small pile of fiction beside him.

She paused before she approached him. Alan had always interested her. Perhaps it was because he had kept himself at a distance but then he had a way of keeping his distance from almost everybody. Alix had thought of him heretofore as a modern exquisite subject to atavic fits that, in times past, had led him into more than one barbarous escapade. It was the flare of daring in these shameful outbursts that had saved him from a suspicion of effeminacy. Now in London she had by chance heard things of him that forced her to a readjustment of her estimate. In six months Alan had turned himself into a mystery.

"Well," she said, coming up behind him, "how are you?"

Alan turned his head slowly and then threw off his rugs and sprang to his feet.

"The sky is clear," he said, "where did you drop from?" His eyes measured her. She was ravishing in a fur toque and coat which had yet to receive their baptism of import duty.

"Oh," said Alix, "my presence is humdrum. Just

the usual returning from six weeks abroad. But you! You come from the haunts of wild beasts and from all accounts you have been one."

"Been one! From all accounts!" exclaimed Alan, a puzzled frown on his face. "Just what do you mean?"

They started walking. "I mean that even in Africa one can't hide from Piccadilly. In Piccadilly you are already known. Not as Mr. Alan Wayne, a New York social satellite, but as a whirlwind in shirt sleeves. Ten Percent Wayne, in short." She looked at him with teasing archness. She could see that he was worried.

"Satellite is rather rough," remarked Alan. "I never was that."

"All bachelors are satellites in the nature of things — satellites to other men's wives."

"Have you a vacancy?" said Alan.

The turn of the talk put Alix in her element. She had never been an ingénue. She had been born with an intuitive defense. Finesse was her motto and artificiality was her foil. It had never been struck from her hands. On the other hand Alan knew that every woman who accepts battle can be reached even if not conquered. It is the approaches to her heart that a woman must defend. Once those are passed, the citadel turns traitor.

They both knew they were embarking upon a dangerous game, but Alix had played it often. No pretty woman takes her European degree without ample occasion for practice and Alix had been through the European mill. She threw out her daintily shod feet

as she walked. She was full of life. She felt like skipping. The light of battle danced merrily in her eyes. She made no other reply.

"I met lots of people we both know," she said, at last.

"Which one of them passed on the news that I had taken to the ways of a wild beast?"

"Oh, that was the Honorable Percy. I only caught a few words. He was telling about a man known as Ten Percent Wayne and the only time he'd ever seen the shirt-sleeve policy work with natives. When I learned it was Africa, I linked up with you at once and screamed and he turned to me and said, 'You know Mr. Wayne?' And I said I had thought I did but I found I only knew him *tiré a quatre epingles* and would n't he draw his picture over again. But just then Lady Merle signaled the retreat, and when the men came out somebody else snaffled Collingeford before I got a chance."

"Oh, Collingeford," said Alan. "I remember." He frowned and was silent.

"Alan," said Alix after a moment, "let me warn you. I see a new tendency in you but before it goes any farther than a tendency let me tell you that a thoughtful man is a most awful bore. When I caught sight of you I thought, 'What a delightful little party,' but if you're going to be pensive there are others —"

Alan glanced at her. "Alix," he said, mimicking her tone, "I see in you the makings of an altogether charming woman. I'm not speaking of the painstaking veneer — I suppose you need that in your walk of

life — but what's under it. There may be others, as you say. Pretty women have taken to wearing men for bangles. But don't you make a mistake. I'm not a bangle. I've just come from the unclothed world of real things. To me a man is just a man and, what's more, a woman is just a woman."

"How un-American," said Alix.

"It's more than that," said Alan, "it's pre-American."

Alix was thoughtful in her turn. Alan caught her by the arm and turned her toward the west. A yawl was just crossing the disk of the disappearing sun. Alix felt a thrill at his touch. "It's a sweet little picture, is n't it?" she said. "But you must n't touch me, Alan. It can't be good for us."

"So you feel it too," said Alan, and took his hand from her arm.

During the voyage they were much together, not in dark corners but waging their battle in the open — two swimmers that fought each other, forgetting to fight the tide that was bearing them out to sea. Alan was not a philanderer to snatch an unrequited kiss. To him a kiss was the seal on surrender. But to Alix the game was its own goal. As she had always played it, nobody had ever really won anything. However, it did not take her long to appreciate that in Alan she had an opponent who was constantly getting under her guard and making her feel things, — things that were alarming in themselves like the jump of one's heart into the throat or the intoxication that goes with hot, racing blood.

Alan's power over women was in voice and words. If he had been hideous it would have been the same. With his tongue he carried Alix away and gave her that sense of isolation which lulls a woman into laxity. One night as they sat side by side, a single great rug across their knees, Alan laid his hand under cover on hers. A quiver went through Alix's body. Her closed hand stirred nervously but she did not really draw it away. "Alan," she said, "I've told you not to! Please don't. It's common — this sort of thing."

Alan tightened his grip. "You say it's common," he said, "because you've never thought it out. Lightning was common till somebody thought it out. I sit beside you without touching you and we are in two worlds. I grip your hand — like this — and the abyss between us is closed. While I hold you nothing can come between."

Alix's hand opened and settled into his. Alan went on. "Words talk to the mind but through my hand my body talks to yours in a language that was old before words were born. If I am full of dreams of you and a desert island, I don't have to tell you about it because you are with me. The things I want, you want. There are no other things in life,— for while I hold you our world is one and it is all ours. Nothing else can reach us."

"For a while they sat silent, then Alix recovered herself. "After all," she said, "we're not on a desert island but on a ship with eyes in every corner."

Alan leaned toward her. "But if we were, Alix! If we were on a desert island — you and I —"

For a moment Alix looked into his burning eyes. She felt that there was fire in her own eyes, too,— a fire she could not altogether control. She disengaged herself and sprang up. Alan rose slowly and stood beside her. He did not look at her parted lips and hot cheeks; he had suddenly become languid. "That's it," he drawled, "eyes in every corner. I wonder how many morals would stand without other people's eyes to prop them up?"

Alix left him. She felt baffled, as though she had tried desperately to get a grip on Alan and her hand had slipped. She felt vaguely that it was essential to her to get a grip on him. She had never played the losing side before and she was troubled.

But with the frank light of morning her troubles melted into nothing and she summoned Alan to her side whenever the whim came to her. Alix's party looked on, amused. "It's all right," said a good-natured matron, "they're cousins."

"So he's a cousin, is he?" remarked a discarded bangle, and added cynically, "what a *point d'appui*!"

Premonition does not come to a woman without cause. Towards the end of the voyage Alix faced, wide-eyed, the revelation that the stakes of the game she and Alan had played were body and soul. "Alan," she said one night with drooping head, "I've had enough. I don't want to play any more. I want to quit." She lifted tear-filled eyes to him. The foil of artificiality had been knocked from her hand. She was all woman and defenseless.

Alan felt a trembling in all his limbs. "I want to

quit, too, Alix," he said in his low vibrating voice, "but I'm afraid we can't. You see, I'm beaten, too. While I was just in love with your body we were safe enough, but now I'm in love with you. It's the kind of love a man can pray for in vain. No head in it; nothing but heart. Honor and dishonor become mere names. Nothing matters to me but you."

Tears crawled slowly down Alix's cheeks. She stood with her elbows on the rail and faced the ocean so no one might see. Her hands were locked. In her mind her own thoughts were running. Somehow she could understand Alan without listening. If only Gerry had done this thing to her, she was thinking, the pitiless wracking misery would have been joy at white heat. She was unmasked at last—but Gerry had not unmasked her. Not once since the day of the wreck and their engagement had Gerry unmasked himself.

Alan was standing with his side to the rail, his eyes leaving her face only to keep track of the promenaders so that no officious friend should take her by surprise. He went on talking. "Our judgment is calling to us to quit but it is calling from days ago," he said. "We would n't listen then and it's only the echo we hear now. We can try to quit if you like, but when I am alone I shall call for you, and when you are alone you will call for me. We will always be alone except when we are near each other. We can't break the tension, Alix. It will break us in the end."

The slow tears were still crawling down Alix's cheeks. In all her life she had never suffered so before. She felt that each tear paid the price of all her levity.

"Alan," she said with a quick glance at him, "did you know when we began that it was going to be like this?"

"No," he answered. "I have trifled with many women and I was ready to trifle with you. No one had ever driven you and I wanted to drive you. I thought I had divorced passion and love. I thought perhaps you had too. But love is here. I am not driving you. We are being driven."

CHAPTER VII

ALIX and Alan were in the grip of a fever that is hard to break save through satiety and ruin. They were still held apart by generations of sound tradition but against this bulwark the full flood of modern life as they lived it was directed. In Alan there was a counter-strain,— a tradition of passion that predisposed him to accept the easy tenets of the growing sensual cult. As he found it more and more difficult to turn his thoughts away from Alix, he strove to regain the clear-headedness that only a year before had held him back from definite moral surrender.

It was only a year ago that the table talk one night had turned on what was Society's religion and he had said, " Society has no religion nowadays ; it has given up religion for a corrosive philosophy of non-ethics."

He had seen clearly then but not clearly enough to save himself. He had played with the corrosive philosophy until he had divorced flesh from the soul and now it was playing with him. He found himself powerless in the grip of his desire for Alix.

With her, things had not gone so far. From the security of the untempted she had watched her chosen world play with fire and only now when temptation assailed her, did she realize the weakness that lies in

every woman once her outposts have fallen and her bare heart becomes engaged in the battle.

Lovers in possession of each other can hide their happiness from a hurried world but it is hard to dissemble the longing look and the reckless craving for bodily nearness to one's heart's desire when it is yet unattained. Not many days had passed after their return when Alan's constant attendance upon Gerry's wife became the absorbing center of interest to their part of town life. People said little enough. Their eyes were too wide open watching the headlong rush towards catastrophe.

One early morning Nance sent for Alan. He found her alone. She had been crying. He came to her where she stood by the fire and she turned and put her arms around his neck. She tried to smile but her lips twitched. "Alan," she said, "I want you to go away."

Alan was touched. He caught her wrists and took her arms from around his neck. "You must n't do that sort of thing to me, Nance. I'm not fit for it." He made her sit down on a great sofa before the fire and sat down beside her. "You remind me to-day of the most beautiful thing I ever heard said of you — by a spiteful friend."

"What was it?" said Nance, turning her troubled eyes to him.

"She said, 'She is only beautiful in her own home.' I never understood it before. It's a great thing to be beautiful in one's own home."

"Oh, Alan," said Nance, catching his hand and holding it against her breast, "it is a great thing. It's the

greatest thing in life. That's why I sent for you — because you are wrecking forever your chance of being beautiful in your own home. And worse than that, you are wrecking Alix's chance. Of course you are blind. Of course you are mad. I *understand*, Alan, but I want to hold you close to my heart until you see — until the fever is cooled. You and Alix cannot do this thing. It is n't as though her people and ours were of the froth of the nation. You and she started life with nothing but Puritan to build on. You may have built just play-houses of sand, but deep down the old rock foundation must endure. You must take your stand on that."

Her eyes had been fixed in the fire but now she turned them to his face. Alan sat with head hanging forward, his gaze and thoughts far beyond the confines of the room. Then he shook himself and got up to go. "I wish we could, Nance," he said gravely and then added half to himself, half to her, "I'll try."

For some days Alan had been prepared to go away and take Alix with him, should she consent. Upon his arrival he had had an interview with McDale & McDale in the course of which that firm opened its eyes and its pocket wider than it ever had before.

"You are out for money, Mr. Wayne," had been the feeble remonstrance of the senior member.

"Just money," replied Alan. "If you owed as much as I do you would be out for it too. Of course, you're not. What do you want? You've got my guarantee. Ten per cent. under office estimates for work and time."

When Alan left McDale & McDale's offices he had

contracted more or less on his own terms and McDale, Junior, said to the Senior. "He's only twenty-six — a boy. How did he beat us?"

"By beating Walton's record first," replied McDale, Senior, "and how he did that time will show."

As he walked slowly back from Nance's, Alan was thinking that after all there was no reason why he should not cut and run — no reason except Alix.

He reached his rooms. As he crossed the threshold a premonition seized him. He felt as if some one were there. He glanced hurriedly about. The rooms were still in the disorder in which he had left them and they were empty. Then he saw that he had stepped on a note that had been dropped through the letter-slip. He picked it up. A thrill went through him as he recognized Alix's handwriting. There was no stamp. It must have been delivered by hand. He tore it open and read: "You said that a moment's notice was all you asked. I will take the Montreal Express with you to-day."

Alan's blood turned to liquid fire. The note conjured before him a vision of Alix. He crushed it and held it to his lips and laughed — not jeeringly but in pure, uncontrolled excitement.

It was not a coincidence that Gerry had sought out Alix at the very hour that Nance was summoning Alan. Gerry and Nance were driven by the same forewarning of catastrophe. Gerry had felt it first but he had been slow to believe, slower to act. He had no precedent for this sort of thing. His whole being was in revolt against

the situation in which he found himself. It was after a sleepless night — a most unheard of thing with him — that he decided he could let things go no longer. He went to Alix's room, knocked and entered.

Alix was up, though the hour was early for her. Fresh from her bath she sat in a sheen of blue dressing-gown before the mirror doing her own hair. Gerry glanced around him and into the bathroom looking for the maid.

"Good-morning," said Alix. "She's not here. Did you want to see her?"

Gerry winced at the levity. He wondered how Alix could play the game she was playing and be gay. Alix finished doing her hair. "There," she said with a final pat and turned to face Gerry.

He was standing beside an open window. He could feel the cold air on his hands. He felt like putting his head out into it. His head was hot. "Alix," he said suddenly without looking at her, "I want you to drop Alan."

"But I don't want to drop Alan," replied Alix lightly.

Gerry whirled around at her tone. His nostrils were quivering. To his amazement his hands fairly itched to clutch her beautiful throat. He could hardly control his voice. "Stop playing, Alix," he gulped. "There's never been a divorcée among the Lansings nor a wife-beater and one is as near this room as the other right now."

Gerry regretted the words as soon as he had said them but Alix was not angry. She looked at him through

narrowed eyes. She speculated on the sensation of being once again roughly handled by this rock of a man. Only once before had she seen Gerry angry and the sight had fascinated her then as it did now. There was something tremendous and impressive in his anger and struggle for control. A great torrent held back by a great strong dam. She almost wished it would break through. She could almost find it in her to throw herself on the flood and let it carry her whither it would. She said nothing.

Gerry bit his lips and turned from her. "And Alan, of all men," he went on. At the words the current of her thoughts was changed. She found herself suddenly on the defensive. "Do you think you are the first woman he has played with and betrayed?" Gerry's lip was curved to a sneer. "A philanderer. A man who surrounds himself with tarnished reputations."

A dull glow came into Alix's cheeks. "Philanderers are of many breeds," she said. "There are those who have the wit to philander with woman and those who can only rise to a whisky or a golf club. Whatever else Alan may be he is not a time-server."

Once aroused Alix had taken up the gauntlet with no uncertain hand. Her first words carried the war into the enemy's camp and they were barbed.

"What do you mean?" said Gerry dully. He had not anticipated a defense.

"I mean what you might have deduced with an effort. What are you but a philanderer in little things where Alan is in great? What have you ever done to hold me or any other woman? I respected you once for what

you were going to be. That has died. Did you think I was going to make you into a man?"

Gerry stood, breathing hard, a great despondency in his heart. Alix went on pitilessly. "What have you become? A monumental time-server on the world and you are surprised that a worker reaches the prize that you can not attain! 'All things come to him who waits.' That's a trite saying. But how about this? There are lots of things that come to him who only waits that he could do without. The trouble with you is that you have built your life altogether on traditions. It is a tradition that your women are faithful, so you need not exert yourself to holding yours! It is a tradition that you can do no wrong, so you need not exert yourself to doing anything at all! You are playing with ghosts, Gerry. Your party was over a generation ago."

Alix had calmed down. There was still time for Gerry to choke her to good effect. The hour could yet be his. But he did not know it. Smarting under the lash of Alix's tongue he made a final and disastrous false step.

"You try to humiliate me by placing me back to back with Alan?" he said, with his new-born sneer. Alix appraised it with calm eyes and found it rather attractive. "Well, let me tell you that Alan is so small a man that if I dropped out of the world to-day, he'd sail for Africa to-morrow and think for the rest of his life of his escape from you as a close shave."

Alix sprang to her feet. She was trembling. Gerry felt a throb of exultation. It was his turn to wound.

"What do you mean?" said Alix very quietly, but it was the quiet of suppressed passion at white heat.

"I mean that Alan is the kind of man who finds other men's wives an economy. He would take everything you have that's worth taking, but not you."

Alix's eyes blazed at him from her white face. "Please go away," she said. He started to speak. "Please go away," she repeated. Her lips were quivering and her face twitched in a way that was terrifying to Gerry. He hurried out repeating to himself over and over, "You have made Alix cry. You have made Alix cry."

Alix toyed with the silver on her dressing-table until he had gone and then she swept across the room to her little writing-desk and wrote the note that Alan had found half an hour later in his rooms.

CHAPTER VIII

GERRY stood in the hall outside Alix's room for a moment hoping to hear a sob, a cry, anything for an excuse to go back. Instead he heard the scratch of a pen but he was too troubled to deduce anything from that. He went slowly down the stairs and out into the street. The biting winter air braced him. He started to walk rapidly. At the end of an hour he found himself standing on a deserted pier. He took off his hat and let the wind cool his head. "I have been a brute," he said to himself. "I have made a woman cry,—Alix!" He turned and walked slowly back to the Avenue and into his club but he still felt uneasy. A waiter brought a whisky and soda and put it at his elbow. Gerry turned on him. "Who told you to bring that?" Then he felt ashamed of his petulance. "It's all right, George," he said, more genially than he had spoken for many a day, "but I don't want it. Take it away."

He sat for a long time and at last came to a resolution. Alix loved roses. He would send her enough to bank her room and he would follow them home. He went up the Avenue to his florist's and stood outside trying to decide whether it should be one mass of blood red or a color scheme. Suddenly the plate glass caught a reflection and threw it in his face. Gerry turned. A

four-wheeler was passing. He could not see the occupant but on top was a large, familiar trunk marked with a yellow girdle. On the trunk was a familiar label. He stared at it and the label stared back at him and finally danced before his mazed eyes as the cab disappeared into the traffic.

Gerry stood for a long while, stunned. He saw a lady bow to him from a carriage and afterwards he remembered that he had not bowed back. Somebody ran into him. He looked back at the flowers massed in the window, remembered that he did not need them now, and drew slowly away. Two men hailed him from the other side of the street. Gerry braced himself, nodded to them and hailed a passing hansom. From the direction Alix's cab had taken he knew the station she was bound for. As he arrived on the platform they were giving the last call for the Montreal Express. He caught sight of Alix hurrying through the gates and followed. As she reached the first Pullman, somebody rapped on the window of the drawing-room. Gerry saw Alan's face pressed against the pane. He watched Alix stop, turn and climb the steps of the car and then he wheeled and hurried from the station.

Where could he go? Not to his club and Alan's. His face would betray the scandal with which the club would be buzzing to-morrow. Not to his big comfortable house. It would be too gloomy. Even in discord, Alix had imparted to its somber oak and deep shadows the glow of buoyant life. When she was there one felt as though there were flowers in the house. Gerry was seized with a great desire to hide from his

world, his mother, himself. He pictured the scare-heads in the papers. That the name of Lansing should be found in that galley! It was too much. He could not face it.

He bought a morning paper full of shipping news and, getting into a taxi, gave the address of his bank. On the way he studied the sailings' column. He found what he wanted. The *Gunter* due to sail that afternoon for Brazil, Pernambuco the first stop.

At the bank Gerry drew out the balance of his current account. It amounted to something over two thousand dollars. He took most of it in Bank of England notes. Then he started home to pack but before he reached the house a vision of the servants, flurried after helping their mistress off, commiserating him to each other, pitying him to his face perhaps, or in the case of the old butler, suppressing a great emotion, was too much for him. He drove instead to a big department store and in an hour had bought a complete outfit. He lunched at one of the quiet restaurants that divide down town from up. The people about him were voluble in French and Spanish. Already he felt as if his exile had begun.

The *Gunter* was to sail at three from Brooklyn. Gerry crossed by the ferry. He did not get out of his cab. Over his baggage, piled outside and in, he caught a glimpse of the suspension bridge. Years and years ago his father had led him across that bridge when it was the eighth wonder of the world. Gerry gave a great sigh at the memory. He had not invaded Brooklyn since. As the cab threaded the interminable and reek-

ing length of Furman Street he looked out and felt himself upon an alien shore.

He had avoided buying a ticket. As the *Gunter* warped out, the purser came to him. "I understand you have no ticket."

"No," said Gerry, drawing a roll of bills. "How much is the passage to Pernambuco?"

The purser fidgeted. "This is irregular, sir."

"Is it?" said Gerry, indifferently.

"I have no ticket forms," said the purser, weakening.

"I don't want a ticket," said Gerry. "I want a good room and three square meals a day."

Long, quiet days on a quiet sea are a master sedative to a troubled mind. Gerry had a great deal to think through. He sat by the hour with hands loosely clasped, his eyes far out on the ocean, tracing the course of his married life and measuring the grounds for Alix's arraignment. Gerry was just and generous to others' faults but not to his own. He had forgotten the sting of Alix's words and, to his growing amazement, saw in himself their justification. A time-server he certainly had been. But he reviewed the lives of many other men in his own leisurely class and decided that he was not without company. After all, what was there in America for such men to do except make more money?

For the first time he was struck by the narrowness of American life. There was only one line of effort. The whole people thronged a single causeway. They made a provincial demand that all should dress alike, look alike, think alike. They pressed on in a body to

the single goal of wealth and when they got there they were lost.

Individualists were rare and unwelcome. Boys stoned Chinamen because they were different; they followed a turbaned Asiatic, strayed to an unfriendly shore, with jeers; an astounded Briton, faultlessly dressed, found his spats the sensation of a street. Each of these incidents Gerry had witnessed with amusement and dismissed without a thought. Now they became so many weather-vanes all pointing the same way. How was it Alan had summed up the history of America? "Men, machinery, machines!"

With the thought of Alan his brow puckered. Here he felt no impulse to indulgence. Some day he would meet Alan and when he did he would break him. The scorn he had expressed to Alix for Alan and Alan's nature was without understanding but it was genuine. He knew there were such men and he ascribed all their acts to a debasement beyond regeneration and none to temperament. From moral laxity there was no appeal beyond the sin itself.

The landfall of Pernambuco awoke him from reveries and introspection. He did not look upon this palm-strewn coast as a land of new beginnings—he sought merely a Lethean shore.

The ship crawled in from an oily sea to the long strip of harbor behind the reef. Above, the sun blazed from a bowl of unbroken blue; on land, the multicolored houses spread like a rainbow under a dark cloud of brown-tiled roofs. Giant plane trees cast blots of shade on the cobbled esplanade of the boat quay. In their

shelter a negress squatted behind her basin of *cous-cous* and another before a tray of fried fish. Around them lounged a ragged crew, boatmen, stevedores and riffraff, black, brown and white. Beyond the trees was a line of high stuccoed houses, each painted a different color, all weather-stained, and some with rusted balconies that threatened to topple on to the passer-by. One bore the legend, "Hôtel d'Europe." There Gerry installed himself.

CHAPTER IX

BETWEEN the hour of writing her note to Alan and the moment when she stepped on the train Alix had had no time to think. She was still driven by the impulse of anger that Gerry's words had aroused. She did not reflect that the wound was only to her pride.

Alan held open the door of the drawing-room. She passed in and he closed it. She did not feel as though she were in a train. On the little table stood a vase. It held a single, perfect rose. Under the vase was a curious doily, strayed from Alan's collection of exotic things. A cushion lay tossed on the green sofa, not a new cushion but one that had been broken in to comforting. Alix took in every detail of the arrangement of the tiny room with her first breath. What forethought, what a note of rest with which to meet a troubled and hurried heart! But how insidious to frame an ignoble flight in such a homelike setting! She felt a slight revolt at the travesty.

Alan was standing with blazing eyes and working face like an eager hound in leash. Alix threw back her veil and looked at him. With a quick stride forward he caught her to him and kissed her mouth until she gasped for breath. With a flash she remembered his own words, "If ever I kiss you I shall bring your soul

out between your lips." To Alix's amazement she did not feel an answering fire. Her body was being lashed with a living flame and her body was cold. In that instant this seemed a terrible thing. She had sold her birthright for a price and the price was turning to dead leaves. She made an effort to kiss Alan back but with the effort shame came over her. There was so much in Alan's kiss. The kiss had brought her soul out between her lips. Her soul stood naked before her and one's naked soul is an ugly thing. The kiss disrobed her, too, and from that last bourne of shame Alix suddenly revolted.

Gasping, she pushed Alan from her. Their eyes met. His were burning, hers were frightened. She moved slowly backward to the door and with her hand behind her opened the latch. Alan did not move. He knew that if he could not hold her with his eyes he could not hold her at all. The train started. Alix passed through the door and rushed to the platform. The porter was about to drop the trap on the steps. Alix slipped by him. With all her force she pushed open the door and jumped. The train was moving very slowly but Alix reeled and would have fallen had it not been for a passing baggageman. He caught her and, still in his arms, Alix looked back. Alan's white face was at the window. He looked steadily at her.

"Ye almost wint with him, Miss," said the baggageman, with a full brogue and a twinkling eye.

"How did you know?" said Alix, dazed.

At the strange question the baggageman's long upper lip drew down to gravity. "Where d' ye think I was

whin ye stipt off the thrain into me arms?" he asked solemnly.

Alix had released herself and his quaint question brought her to her senses. She looked at him. He was a mass of burly kindliness surmounted by a shock of gray hair. "There, there," she said conciliatingly, "it was a foolish question. Will you get me a cab? I don't want a porter."

"No fear, Miss," said the baggageman. "I'll hand ye over to no naygur. If they says anything to me I'll tell 'em we're friends." The smile was back in his face and the twinkle in his eye. He started off, his gray head cocked to one side.

"That's right," said Alix as she followed his lead to a cab. She got in and then shook hands with her escort. He looked at the dollar bill her grasp left behind.

"That was n't called for, Miss. It was enough for me to have saved ye from a fall."

"You did n't save me," said Alix with a bewildering smile. "I saved myself."

She left him scratching his head over this fresh enigma.

Alix was tired and hungry when she got back home but excitement kept her up. She felt that she stood on the threshold of new effort and a new life. After all, she thought, it was she that had made her dear old Gerry into a time-server. She could have made him into anything else if she had tried. She longed to tell him so. Perhaps he would catch her and crush her in his arms as Alan had done. She laughed at herself for wanting

him to. She rang for the butler. "Where's your master, John?"

"I don't know, ma'am. Mr. Gerry has n't come back since he went out this morning." To John, Mr. Lansing was a person who had been dead for some time. His present overlords were Mr. and Mrs. Gerry and Mrs. Lansing when she was in town.

"Telephone to the club and if he is there tell him I want to see him," said Alix and turned to her welcome tea. The sandwiches seemed unusually small to her ravenous appetite.

Gerry was not at the club. Alix dressed resplendently for dinner. Never had she dressed for any other man with the care that she dressed for Gerry that night. But Gerry did not come. At half-past nine Alix ordered the table cleared. "I'll not dine to-night," she said to John. "When your master comes, show him in here." She sat on in the library listening for Gerry's step in the hall.

From time to time John came into the room to replenish the fire. On one of these occasions Alix told him he might go to bed but an hour later he returned and stood in the door. Alix looked very small, curled up in a great leathern chair by the fire.

"It's after one o'clock, ma'am," said John. "Mr. Gerry won't be coming in to-night." Alix made no answer. John held his ground. "It's time for you to go to bed, ma'am. Shall I call the maid?"

It was a long time since John had taken any apparent interest in his mistress. Alix had avoided him. She had felt that the old servant disapproved of her. More

than once she had thought of discharging him but he had never given her grounds that would justify her before Gerry. Now he was ordering her to bed and instead of being angry she was soothed. She wondered how she could ever have thought of discharging him. He seemed strong and restful, more like part of the old house than a servant. Alix got up. "No, don't call the maid. I won't need her," she said. Then she added, "Good-night, John," as she passed out.

John held wide the door and bowed with a deference that was a touch more sincere than usual. He answered, "Good-night," as if he meant it.

Alix was exhausted but it was long before she fell asleep. She cried softly. She wanted to be comforted. She had dressed so beautifully — she had been so beautiful — and Gerry had not come home. As she cried, her disappointment grew into a great trouble.

She awoke early from a feverish sleep. Immediately a sense of weight assailed her. She rang and learned that Gerry had not yet come home. Then his words of yesterday suddenly came to her. "If I dropped out of the world to-day —" Alix stared wide-eyed at the ceiling. Why had she remembered those words? She lay for a long time thinking. Her breakfast was brought to her but she did not touch it. It was almost noon in the cloudy Sunday morning when she roused herself from apathy. She sprang from the bed. She summoned Judge Healey with a note and Mrs. Lansing with a telegram. The telegram was carefully worded, "Please come and stay for a while. Gerry is away."

The Judge found Alix radiating the freshness of a

beautiful woman careful of her person, but it was the freshness of a pale flower. Alix was grave and her gravity had a sweetness that made the Judge's heart bound. He felt an awakening in her that he had long watched for. She told him all the story of the day before in a steady monotone that omitted nothing and gave the facts only their own weight.

When she had finished the Judge patted her hand. "You would make a splendid witness, my dear," he said. "Now, what you want is for me to find Gerry and bring him back, is n't it?"

"Yes," said Alix, "if you can."

"Nonsense! Of course I can. Men don't drop out of the world so easily nowadays. But I still want to know a thing or two. Are you sure Gerry knew nothing of your — er — excursion to the station?"

Alix shook her head. "From the time he left my room and the house he has not been back."

"Has he been to the club?"

Alix colored faintly. "I see," said the Judge quickly. "I'll ask there. I'll go now." He went off and all that day he sought in vain for a trace of Gerry. He went to all his haunts in the city — he had telephoned to those outside. At night he returned to Alix but it was Mrs. Lansing that received him in the library.

The Judge was tired and his buoyancy had deserted him. He told her of his failure. Mrs. Lansing was thoughtful but not greatly troubled. "Gerry," she said, "has a level head. He may have gone away but that is all. He can take care of himself." She went to

tell Alix that there was no news. When she came back the Judge turned to her. "Well," he asked, "what did she say?"

"Nothing, except that she wanted to know if you had tried the bank."

The Judge struck his fist into his left hand. "Never thought of it," he said. "That child has a head!" He went to the telephone. From the president of the bank he traced the manager, from the manager, the cashier. Yes, Gerry had been at the bank on Saturday. The cashier remembered it because Mr. Lansing had drawn a certain account in full. He would not say how much.

"There," said the Judge with a sigh of relief, "that's something. It takes a steady nerve to draw a bank account in full. You must take the news upstairs. I'm off. I'll follow up the clue to-morrow."

There was a new look of content mingled with the worry in Mrs. Lansing's face that made the Judge say as he held out his hand in farewell, "Things better?"

Mrs. Lansing understood him. "Yes," she answered, and added, "we have been crying together."

Mrs. Lansing and Alix had never given themselves to each other. There had been no warfare between them but equally there had never been understanding. To Mrs. Lansing's inherent calm, Alix's scintillation had been repellent and Alix before Gerry's mother had felt much the same restraint as before Gerry's old butler.

There had been strength in Mrs. Lansing's calm. She had been waiting and now the waiting was over. Alix had given herself tearful and almost wordless into

arms that were more than ready and had then poured out her heart in a broken tale that would have confounded any court of justice but which between women was clearer than logic.

At the end Mrs. Lansing said nothing. Instead she petted Alix, carried her off to bed and kept her there for three days. In her waking hours Alix added spasmodic bits to her confession — sage reflections after the event, dreamy “I wonders” that speculated in the past and in the measure of her emotions.

Mrs. Lansing sat and listened and sewed. Her soft brown hair just touched with gray, her calm face with its half-hidden strength, her steady eyes, turned now on Alix, now on her work, brought peace into the room and held it there in spite of the disquieting lack of news of Gerry.

When she spoke at last it was to say half-shyly, “You are stronger than I had thought. I believe every woman at the actual moment of surrender feels an impulse of shame and fear. During that moment desire lets go of her. It’s the last chance that fate holds out. The women who fail to take the chance,— it seems to me they fail through weakness of spirit and not of flesh.

“More women are ruined by circumstance than by desire. Women decide to burn their bridges behind them and then they think they’ve burned them. All the circumstances were against you. There was n’t a loophole in the net. Fate gave you your moment and you tore your way out.”

On the fourth day Alix got up but on the fifth

she stayed in bed. Mrs. Lansing found her pale and frightened. She had been crying.

"Alix," she whispered, kneeling beside the bed, "what is it?"

Alix told her amid sobs. "Oh, my dear," said Mrs. Lansing, throwing her arms around her, "don't cry. Don't worry. The strength will come with the need. In the end you'll be glad. So will Gerry. So will all of us."

"It is n't that," said Alix, faintly. "Oh, it is n't that. I'm just thinking and thinking how terrible it would have been if I had run away — really run away. I keep imagining how awful it would have been. It is nightmare."

"Call it a nightmare if you like, sweetheart, but just remember that you are awake."

"Yes," said Alix softly. "I am awake now. Mother, I want to go to Red Hill. I know it's early but I want to go now. I want to watch the Hill come to life and dress up for the summer. It will amuse me. It's long since I have watched for the first buds and the first swallows. I won't mind the melting snow and the mud. It's so long since I've seen clean country mud. I want to smell it."

"You don't know how bleak the Hill can be before the spring comes," objected Mrs. Lansing.

"Will it be any bleaker with me there than when you were alone?" asked Alix.

Mrs. Lansing came over to her and kissed her. "No, dear," she said.

CHAPTER X

IN the squalid Hôtel d'Europe Gerry occupied a large room that overlooked the quay. Even if there had been a better hotel in town he would not have moved. Here he looked out on a scene of never-ceasing movement and color. The setting changed with the varying light. The false rains of the midsummer season came up in black horses of cloud driven by a furious wind. They passed with a whirl and a veritable clatter of heavy drops hurled against the earth in a splendid volley. The long strip of the quay emptied at the first wet shot. The tatterdemalion crowd invaded every doorway and nook of shelter with screams and laughter. Then the sun again, and back came the throng to the fresh-washed quay.

At night, life was still there. Boatmen slept face down on the stones. Long, lugger-rigged craft crawled heavily by on the outward tide. Smaller boats, their lateen rigging creaking with every puff of air, slipped by them, frailer but more eager to face the dangers of the seas crashing beyond the reef. Last and most wonderful of all came the fleet of tiny catamarans,—five long poles pinned together and a centerboard. Above, a boomless sail towering to a point. On such flimsy contraptions did the little brown fishermen head for the deep sea, far out of sight of land, full of an

unquestioning faith in the landward breeze at night to bring them home.

They did not love work, these men, but they loved the long loafing after a good haul. As on the sea so on land. Throughout the great, filthy, stuccoed city to its wide-spread, muddy skirts, where mud-walled, grass-thatched houses dotted a hundred twining valleys, nobody worked for a competence. They worked for their daily bread and when that was assured they turned with light hearts to cigarettes and the juice of the cane — time-servers who denied the very existence of their overload.

Gerry was not lonely. He wandered interested through all the straggling city. Its bridges; its twisted lines of bright-colored houses; its stench; its ludicrous street-cars drawn by jack-rabbit mules or puffy miniature steam-engines; its wonderful suburbs where great, many-windowed houses raised their tiled roofs above long blank walls, glass-crested and overhung with rioting hibiscus, climbing fuchsia and blazing bougainvillea and, looming above all, the cool black domes of giant mango trees,— these things gave him a thousand new and delicate sensations. He was a discoverer, a Martian come to earth, and he forgot to look back.

When he was too lazy to go to the city he sat in the precarious balcony of his room and watched the city come to him. The long quay with its huge plane trees was the little maelstrom of the city's life. It was not the market but, nevertheless, here one could buy anything from a gaited saddle horse to a queen ant dressed up as a doll. Piles of fruit dotted the shade. Golden pineapples lay in a pool of their own juice. The giant

manga rosa, largest, most beautiful and most tasteless of mangoes, nestled in banana leaves twisted to form a basket, its cheeks of glowing pink turned up to catch the eye of the ignorant or the devotee of beauty without worth. Lesser mangoes were heaped in pyramids on the bare stones. Around these gathered connoisseurs, barefooted, bareheaded and with no more clothes than the law demands but each provided with a long pointed knife, deftly handled. Land of the Knife, the more temperate sections of the South had named this sister state. Lion of the North they called themselves and cheerfully supported a prison island where four hundred of their fellows were in durance for murder.

Threading through piles of fruit and the trays of vendors of a dozen forms of mandioc came a cow with her calf tied to her tail. A shrewd Portuguese attended her. Customers got their milk fresh but it was mostly foam. A drove of turkeys in charge of a man with a whip passed by. Chickens in wicker baskets slung at the ends of a pole; parrots in hundreds, sure bait for the sailor's money; trays of stuffed humming-birds; jars of dried green beetles; marmosets, monkeys, macaws, toucans, snakes, a captive racoon, each in turn held Gerry for its allotted time.

The better classes, Brazilians dressed as though they had stepped off the boulevards of Paris and linen-clad merchants of half-a-dozen nations, did not interest him. They were merely familiar background to the things that were new.

Gerry missed his club but for that he found a substitute. Cluny's, next door to the hotel, was a strange hall

of convivial pleasure. A massive square door, whose masonry centuries had hardened and blackened to stone, gave on to a long hallway that ended in a wider dungeon. Here stood a bar and half-a-dozen teak tables. The floor was all of stone flags.

The clientele had the cleavage of oil and water. One section stood to their drink at the bar, had it and went out. The other sat to their glasses at the tables and sat late. Among these was a pale thin man of about Gerry's age with a mouth slightly twisted to humor until toward evening drink loosened it to mere weakness. One afternoon he nodded to Gerry and Gerry left the bar for the tables. After that they sat together. The man was an American — the American Consul. Gerry liked him, pitied him, and forgot to pity himself. One night he invited the Consul to his room. They sat in the balcony, a bottle of whisky and a syphon between them. Gerry started to put his glass on the rail.

"Don't do it," said the Consul with his twisted smile, "it might carry away." He went on more seriously. "It's rotten. The whole place is rotten. There's a blight on the men and the women and on the children. God!"

Gerry put down his glass untouched. "Why don't you go home?"

The Consul took a long drink, eyed the empty glass and spoke into it. "I used to think just like that. 'Why don't you go home?' I used to think I could go home — that it was just a question of buying a ticket and climbing aboard a liner. But —" he broke off and glanced at Gerry as he refilled his glass.

"But what?" said Gerry.

"Well," said the Consul, "I'm just drunk enough to tell you. I'm only proud in the mornings before I'm thoroughly waked up. I used to drive a pen for a Western daily at twenty-five dollars a week. It was good pay and I married on it. I and the girl, we lived like the corn-fed hogs of our native state. Life was one sunshine and when the baby came we joined hands and said good-by to sorrow forever. Then her people got busy and landed me this job. The pay was three thousand and if you want to see how big three thousand dollars a year can look, just go and stand behind any old kind of plow in Kansas. I jumped at it. We sold out our little outfit and raked up just enough to see me out here. The girl and the kid went to visit her people. I was to save up out of the first quarter's pay and send for them. That was three years ago."

He stopped, plunged in thought. Gerry said nothing but lit a long cigar. The Consul went on. "The price of a lunch here would give me three squares at home and I could support the family for a month on the price of a suit of clothes. But even so, I could have sent the money if I had been somebody's clerk. Somehow, we don't realize at home what position means abroad. Little humdrum necessities, food and clothing, the few drinks of the evening after the day's work with which every man in the tropics braces mind and body and no harm done, these commonplace things and the decency in appearances that any official must keep up, they made that big three thousand look like a snowball in summer. Try? I did try. But I could n't run to

a dozen suits of whites and twice as many shirts. I got to wearing a collar for two days as well. And let me tell you that when you're among the clean in the tropics, that's the beginning of the end.

"They could n't understand it at home. First came surprise, then scolding, then just plain pleading. That did for me. I left my place at the bar in Cluny's and took a seat at the tables. I've sat there for two years and nobody ever takes my chair. They call it the American Consulate.

"I've still got to tell you the worst. Just to speak English here makes you a member of a clan. The people I'd made friends with, and some that I had n't, took up a purse for me. Enough to cover my ticket and a tidy sum besides. They'd done it before. Irish, Scotch, English or American, it was all one to them. They gave an ex-friend the last chance of *home*. They might have known that with me, if I was far enough gone to take the money, I was too far gone to save. I took it and I went to my room and blubbered."

He stopped again. There was a long silence; then he went on. "And so I took the money. The steamer sailed without me. In three days the money was gone."

"You paid it back?" said Gerry. His face was red with shame. He felt as if he had helped to steal from that relief fund.

"Yes, I paid it back," said the Consul, "and they've put it in the bank. It's ticketed for the next American that needs the last chance of home. Those fellows—they saw me sweat blood to pay, and so they did that."

"Do you see that steamer out there?" said Gerry.

"Well, she's bound for home. I want to give you the chance that comes after the last chance. I want you to let me send you home."

The Consul looked around. His pendulous lip twisted into a smile. "So you took all that talk for the preamble to a touch!"

"No, I did n't," said Gerry indignantly.

"Well, well, never mind," said the Consul. "There's nothing left to go back to and there's nothing left to go back. That little account in the bank and what it may do for some poor devil is the only monument I'll ever build."

The whisky bottle was almost empty but Gerry's glass was still untouched. The Consul pointed at it. "You can still leave it alone? I don't know where you come from, or what you're loafing in this haven of time-servers for, but I'm going to give you a bit of advice. You take that steamer yourself."

Gerry colored. "I can't," he stammered. "There's nothing left for me either to go home to." He said nothing more. The Consul had suddenly turned drowsy.

CHAPTER XI

ALMOST a month had passed since Gerry landed on his Lethean shore, and it had served him well. But that night on the balcony woke him up. The world seemed to have time-servers in small regard. First Alix and now this consul chap. Gerry began to think of his mother. He strolled over to the cable station. The offices were undergoing repairs. The ground floor was unfurnished save for a table and one chair. In the chair sat a chocolate-colored employee with a long bamboo on the floor beside him. Gerry's curiosity was aroused. He went in and wrote his message to his mother — just a few words telling her he was all right. The chocolate gentleman folded the message, slipped it into the split end of the bamboo and stuck it up through a hole in the ceiling to the floor above. Gerry smiled and then laughed at the gravity with which his smile was received. The man looked at him in astonishment. These English were all mad and discourteous. What was there to laugh at in a man at work?

Gerry went out and rambled over the city. Night came on. He was restless. He wished he had not sent the message. It was forming itself into a link. He dined badly at a restaurant and then wandered back to the quay. Arriving steamers were posted on a black-board under a street lamp. The mail from New York

was due to-morrow. The Consul's papers would be full of the latest New York society scandal — his scandal. He went to his room and sat on the balcony watching the varied craft preparing to drift out on the tide. Suddenly he got up and went down to the quay.

A long, raking craft was taking on its meager provisions. Gerry engaged its captain in a pantomime parley. The boat was bound for Penedo to take on cotton. Gerry decided to go to Penedo. Two of the crew went back with him to get his baggage. The hotel was closed. Gerry was the only guest and he had his key. He had paid his weekly bill that day, so there was no need to wake any one up. In half an hour he and his belongings were stowed on the deck of the *Josephina* and she was drifting slowly down to the bar.

Four days later they were off the mouth of the San Francisco. They doubled in and tacked their way up to Penedo. There was no life in Penedo. It was desolate and lonely compared with the Hôtel d'Europe and the lively quay; so when a funny little stern-wheeler started up the river on its weekly trip to Piranhas, Gerry went with it.

Piranhas was a town of mud plastered against a barren cliff. It made no pretense to being alive. Here a dead man could live in peace with his surroundings. From fifteen miles up the river came the rumble of the mighty Paulo Affonso Falls, singing a perpetual requiem. Gerry established himself in a hovel of an inn that even in this far retreat did not dare call itself hotel.

The only industry in Piranhas was the washing of

clothes and the women did that. Fish were caught in great quantities but fishing was not an industry. Here, too, man fished only when he was hungry.

Gerry chartered a ponderous canoe. At first he had a man to paddle him up and down and sometimes across the wide half-mile of water. But before long he learned to handle the thing himself. The heavy work soon trimmed his splendid muscles into shape. He supplied the hostelry with a variety of fish.

One morning he woke earlier than usual. The wave of life was running high in his veins. He sprang up and, still in his pajamas, hurried out for his morning swim. The break of day was gloriously chilly. A cool breeze, hurrying up from the sea, was steadily banking up the mist that hung over the river. Gerry sprang into his canoe and pushed off. He drove its heavy length up stream, not in the teeth of the current, for no man could do that, but skirting the shore, seizing on the help of every eddy and keeping an eye out for the green swirling mound that meant a pinnacle of rock just short of the surface. He went further up the river than ever before. His muscles were keyed to the struggle. He passed the last jutting bend that the best boatmen on the river could master and found himself in a bay protected by a spit of sand, rock-tipped and foam-tossed where it reached the river's channel. From this point the river was a chaos of jagged rocks that fought the mighty tide hurled from the falls still miles above.

Gerry ran the canoe upon the shore and stripped. He stepped on to the spit of sand. In that moment just to live was enough. He stretched his arms out and,

looking down, watched the fine texture of his body turn to goose-flesh. Then the sun broke out and helped the wind clear the last bank of mist from the river. Gerry's body took on a rosy glow. He had never seen it like that before and as he looked a sharp cry broke on his astonished ears.

Almost at the end of the tongue of sand stood a girl. A white cotton robe was at her feet. Her hair was blowing around her slim shoulders. Over one of them she gazed, startled, at Gerry. He drew back horribly confused and mumbling apologies that she could not have understood even if she could have heard them. Then she plunged with a clean long dive into the river. But before she plunged she laughed. Gerry heard the laugh. With an answering cry he hurled himself into the water and swam as he had never swum before.

The girl had further to go across the little bay, but she could beat Gerry swimming and she did. Only she failed to use her head and, when she found bottom, started to wade. Wading is slow work in water waist high. Gerry stuck to his long powerful stroke. As the girl reached the bank the strong fingers of his right hand closed on her bare ankle.

CHAPTER XII

GERRY'S cablegram to his mother was forwarded to Red Hill on the very day that the Judge had gone up to tell them that no trace could be found of the missing man. The Judge was more down-hearted than ever over Gerry's disappearance and when he found the two women radiating happiness and excitement his heart sank lower still.

"I have n't any good news," he said ruefully before he alighted.

"Tease him," said Alix in a low tone to Mrs. Lansing.

But Mrs. Lansing had found new lines in the Judge's tired face and she whispered back, "I can't." She put the cablegram in the Judge's hand.

"What's this?" he said and read it. Then he gave a war-whoop, caught Alix around the waist and kissed her.

The Firs were gay that night — gay with the joy of happy people happily planning. In a month, say at the most, two months, Gerry could be here. Spring would have come. The Hill would be decked out in full regalia of leaf and blossom. It would be in full commission to meet him. They looked at Alix and Alix seemed to look at herself. He would come into his own as never before.

The Judge undertook the cabling. He cabled Gerry

and the message was reported undelivered. Then he cabled the American Consul. There followed a long series of messages; first quick and hopeful, then lagging but not doubtful, then a wearying silence of weeks, ending with the inevitable blow. Gerry had been traced to the San Francisco river. The envoy sent on his track by the Judge's orders had reached Piranhas to find the little town in apathetic wonder over the discovery of Gerry's canoe stranded three miles down the river. The paddle was still in the canoe and a suit of pajamas. No further trace of Gerry had been found. His body had not been recovered. The people said it was not unusual. He had undoubtedly been attacked by tiger fish. In that case his bones would have been stripped of flesh. It was impossible to drag the great river.

The Judge hid in his heart the harrowing details. To Mrs. Lansing he told the central fact. She was struck dumb with grief and then she thought of Alix. Almost hastily they decided that it was not a time to tell Alix and during long months they put her off with false news of the search. They carried it further and further into the wilds of the subcontinent. The country was so vast, there was no telling when the messenger would finally come up with Gerry.

Alix bore the strain with wonderful patience. The truth was that her thoughts were not on Gerry. Something greater than Gerry was claiming all her faith,—all her strength of body and soul. She did not talk. She was holding that final communion with her innermost self with which a woman dedicates her body to pain and sacrifice. Alix was not afraid. In those days

the spirit of the race — her race of pioneers — shone from her steady eyes and even put courage in those about her.

Only when the ordeal was over and an heir to the house of Lansing had raised his lusty voice in apparent rage at having been born to so small a kingdom, did the frail Alix of other days come back. As she lay, pale and thin, but with the glorious light of supreme achievement in her eyes, Mrs. Lansing went on her knees beside the bed and sobbed, "Oh, Alix, I love you so, I love you so!"

Alix smiled. Slowly she reached one hand over and placed it in Mrs. Lansing's. "You are crying because you are a granny now," she said, softly, playfully.

Then came the day when Alix was strong — strong enough. Mrs. Lansing told her in a choked voice what they knew and what every one believed. She cried softly in Alix's arms.

"Poor Mother!" said Alix, her lips against the wet cheek. "How strong you've been! How you hid it from me! What a burden to carry in your heart, and smile. But listen, dear Mummy. You are all wrong. Perhaps I would not have known it if you had told me — then — but I know it now. Gerry is not dead. There is no river that can drown Gerry."

"My dear," said Mrs. Lansing, frightened, "you must not think that. It's always the best swimmers that risk the most."

"It is n't that he can swim," said Alix. Her eyes turned slowly till they rested on her son. Her bosom swelled at the memory of the travail — the terrible tra-

vail that she had borne, not for the child alone, nor for Gerry alone, but for them both. "Swimming has nothing to do with it. Somehow I know that Gerry is all right, somewhere on this little world. Only, dear," and here her voice faltered and her eyes shone with tears, "this little world seems mighty big when hearts are far apart."

Alix clung to her belief. So strong was her faith that Mrs. Lansing became infected, but the Judge held out against them. "My heart is with you," he said, at the end of months, "but my head won't turn. A naked man even in South America would have caused remark. Why should n't he have come back for his clothes, for his money? After all, he was n't a fugitive from justice. He was a man wandering over the earth in pursuit of a mere whim and a whim does n't last forever."

Alix interrupted him. "Judge, I have never been angry with you. We all owe you too much. But if you ever say 'was' about Gerry again —" She stopped and bit her lip but her eyes spoke for her.

"My dear girl," said the Judge and only his color showed that he was hurt, "don't be angry with me. It shall be as you say. I've only been trying to save you from years of weary waiting. If you have the courage to wait for sorrow, I shall wait too."

Alix kissed him. "There," she said, "I'm sorry I was rough."

"You! rough!" laughed the Judge. Then he jumped up. "I'm forgetting my duties. I have a guest of my very own over at Maple House and I must go to him."

A few weeks before, the Hon. Percy Collingeford had looked up the Judge. It was as much a pleasure to the young man as a duty he owed to his father, whose friend the Judge had been for many years.

Collingeford was no stranger to America but he knew far more about dodging arroyos in New Mexico on a cow pony than he did about dodging the open trenches and debris of Fifth Avenue on the trail of a tea-party. He was an Englishman, a younger son with enough money to put him above the remittance class, and he was possessed of far more intelligence than he had been born with, for, from his youth up, he had sought out experience in many places. He came back from the Klondike with more money than he needed for his passage but only a few kindred spirits knew that he had made it hammering the piano in The Fallen Star of Hope. He had the English gentleman's common creed: ride straight, shoot straight, tub often and talk the King's English. That creed fulfilled, nothing else seemed to worry him.

He was dining with the Judge at the club one night when the name of Wayne — Alan Wayne — floated over occasionally from a neighboring table. Later as they sat over their coffee and cigars Collingeford said abruptly, "I know a chap named Wayne."

"So?" said the Judge.

"Heard those people mention Alan Wayne," explained Collingeford. "I wondered if it was the same one — Ten Percent Wayne of Africa."

"That's the one," said the Judge and watched Collingeford's face.

“Hum,” said Collingeford. “When I saw Wayne he was in shirt sleeves and a battered sun helmet. There are some men that won’t shake hands with him, but I ’m not one of them.”

It was then that the Judge decided to take Collingeford to Maple House for over Sunday.

CHAPTER XIII

GERRY LANSING was sitting alone in the shade of a bush, his knees gathered in his arms and his head bowed down. Great quivering sighs that were almost sobs were shaking his strong body. In one terrific swirl life had wrenched him from the moorings of generations, tossed him high and dropped him, broken. He had after all been only a weakling, waiting to fall at the first temptation. It seemed as if it could not be true. The sun had only just risen. The mist still hung in the air in wisps. It was still early morning — the morning that he had found so glorious — the morning in which just to live had seemed enough. But it was true. Between the moment when he had plunged from the sandspit and the moment when he and the girl had stood on the river bank and laughed together to see the canoe, worked adrift by the eddy, swirl out into the river and away, eons had passed. In that laughing moment he had stood primeval man in a primeval world. With the drops of water from the river he had flicked off the bonds it had taken centuries to forge. And now the storm was past, the elation over, and his truant conscience returned to stand dismayed before the devastation of so short a lapse.

The girl, dressed in a homespun cotton robe belted at the waist, came back down a half-hidden path, shyly

at first and then with awe to see him weeping. She tossed him a cotton jumper and trousers and then drew back and waited for him in the path. He picked up the garments and looked at them. They were such simple clothes as he had seen laborers wearing. He rose slowly to his feet, dressed and followed the girl.

She led him along the path through the brush and out into a little valley made up of abandoned cane and rice bottoms. In the center was a slight elevation, too low to be called a hill, and on it was an old plantation house, white stucco once, now sadly weather-streaked, its tiles green-black with the moss of years.

She pointed to the house and then to herself and smiled. He understood the pantomime and nodded. When they reached the house a withered and wrinkled little woman came out to the arched veranda to meet them. She looked Gerry over shrewdly and then held out her hand. He shook it listlessly. They walked through a long dividing hall. On each side were large rooms, empty, save one where a big bed, a wash-stand, and an old bureau with mildewed glass, were grouped like an oasis in a desert. They reached the kitchen. It was evidently the living-room of the house. A hammock cut off one corner. Chairs were drawn up to a rough, uncovered table. A stove was built into the masonry and a cavernous oven gaped from the massive wall.

At the stove was an old negress, making coffee with shaky deliberation. On the floor sat an old darky clad only from his waist down in such trousers as Gerry was wearing, except that they were soiled and tattered. He

looked up and fastened his eyes on Gerry and then struggled to his feet. Dim recollections of some bygone white master brought a gleam into his bleary eyes. He raised his hand in the national gesture of child to parent, slave to master. "Blessing, Master, blessing." Gerry had learned the meaning of the quaint custom. "God bless thee," he answered in badly jumbled Portuguese. The girl and the wrinkled little woman looked at him, surprised, and then smiled at each other as women smile at the first steps of a child.

They made him sit down at the table and placed before him crisp rusks of mandioc flour and steaming coffee whose splendid aroma triumphed over the sordidness of the scene and through the nostrils reached the palate with anticipatory touch. It was sweetened with dark, pungent syrup and was served black in a capacious bowl, as though one could not drink too deeply of the elixir of life.

Gerry ate ravenously and sipped the coffee, at first sparingly, then greedily. The old negress fluttered nervously about the stove, nursing its inadequate fire of charcoal. Her eyes were big with wonder at the capacity of the white master. The old negro had sunk back to his seat on the floor. The two white women stood and watched Gerry. The more he ate the more they urged.

Gerry set down the empty bowl with a sigh. The rusks had been delicious. Before the coffee the name of nectar dwindled to impotency. Its elixir rioted in his veins. At the sigh the girl had deftly rolled a cigarette in a bit of corn husk, scraped thin as paper.

Now she slipped it into his fingers. The old negress picked up a live coal and, passing it from shaky hand to shaky hand, deposited it on his plate. Gerry lit the cigarette. With the first long contented whiff he smiled. The smile brought stinging recollection. With a frown he threw away the cigarette and rose from the table. "The brute is fed and laughs," he said aloud and strode from the room. The girl and the little wrinkled woman looked at each other in dismay. They seemed to sense the unintelligible words. The old darky crawled across the floor and possessed himself of the cigarette.

Gerry went to seat himself on the steps of the veranda. Before him stretched the fallow valley, beyond it gleamed the black line of the rushing river. To the right were the ruins of a sugar mill and stables. To the left the debris that once had been slaves' quarters. The fields still bore the hummocks, in rough alignment, that told the story of past years fruitful in cane. All was waste, all was ruin.

The girl slipped to a seat beside him. She rolled a fresh cigarette and then shyly laid a small brown hand on his arm. Gerry looked at her. Her big brown eyes were sorrowful and pleading. She held out the cigarette with a little shrug that deprecated the smallness of the offering.

Gerry felt a twinge of remorse. He patted the hand that lay on his arm, smiled, and took the cigarette. The girl's face lit up. She called and again the negress brought fire. This time Gerry smoked gravely. The girl sat on beside him. Her hand lay in his.

So they sat until the sun passed the zenith and, slip-

ping over the eaves, fell like fire on their bare feet. Gerry stood up, pointed to himself and then down the river to the town. The girl shook her head. She made him understand that he was cut off from the town by an impassable tributary to the great river — that he would have to make a long detour inland. Then she swept her hand from the sun to the horizon to show him that the day was too far gone for the journey.

He was not much concerned. An apathy seized him at the thought of going back. He felt as though shame had left some visible scar on his countenance that men must see and read. As he stood, thoughtful and detached, the girl grasped his arm with both her hands and drew his attention to her. Then she gave one sweep of her arm that embraced all the ruin of house and mill and fields. She pointed to herself. He understood: these things were hers. Then she folded her hands and with a gesture of surrender laid them in his.

It was eloquent. There was no mistaking her meaning. Gerry was touched. He held both her clasped hands in one of his and put his arm around her shoulders. She fixed her eyes on his face for the answer. Once more Gerry's eyes wandered over all that ruin. After all, he thought, why not? Why not bury his own ruin here in company? But she read no decision in his face though she watched it long. What she saw was debate and for the time it satisfied her.

Gerry all that afternoon was very silent and thoughtful — silent because there was no one he could talk to, thoughtful because the idea the girl had put into his head was taking shape, aided by a long chain of circum-

stances. He looked back over his covered trail. If he had been some shrewd fugitive from justice he could not have planned it better. His sudden flight without visiting his home, his failure to buy a ticket, the subornation of the purser with its assurance of silence as to his presence or destination, all that had been wiped out by his cablegram to his mother. But then fate had stepped in again and once more blotted out the trail. Gerry pictured the finding of the canoe and paddle with his pajamas miles away from the spot where he had left them. Supposing there were any search for him from home, and there was no reason to believe there would be since he had cabled reassurance to his mother, it would come up against a blank wall with the tracing of the canoe, the pajamas and the paddle. They formed a clue which could lead to but one conclusion.

His mother would have understood his flight from the disgrace that undoubtedly had flaunted itself in every one of his familiar haunts. Secure in the retreat of Red Hill she had probably truly pictured him fleeing from the memory of Alix and the fall of the name of Lansing. Then there was the cablegram to reassure her. In all probability there had been no search, but even if there were, it must in the end come up against this new obliteration of the trail! The fact recurred again and again in his thoughts. In the terrible hour after the scene of Alix's surrender to Alan he had longed to hide from his world, from his mother and from himself. Some genius had heard his wish. The old Gerry Lansing was dead. Even from himself the old Gerry Lansing had been torn away in a chariot of fire. Pas-

sion had swirled its flame about him and left ruin,—ashes.

In the cool of the evening he looked about him. The tiny world into which he had fallen was penurious but self-contained. Such fabrics as there were, were homespun from the bolls of a scraggy patch of cotton bushes. The beans of castor plants, those giant weeds that haunt all scenes of ruin in the subcontinent, supplied oil for feeble lights at night. A little oil in a clay dish with a twisted wick of cotton giving forth more smoke than light seemed to fix him in his setting of prehistoric man. The rice, gathered from an enduring bottom, cultivated by no effort aside from the impassive rise and fall of the river, formed with mandioc, the backbone of the household's sustenance. From the outcrops of the abandoned cane fields, with the assistance of an antediluvian hand-mill and an equally antiquated iron pot, they made the black syrup that served for sugar. Salt, slightly alkaline, was plentiful. A few cows and their progeny lived in the open and lived well, for, even untilled, the lands of the valley were rich. An occasional member of the herd was carried off to market by the old darky. The proceeds bought the very few contributions of civilization necessary to the upkeep of the lenten life.

Gerry decided. He looked at the girl and she ran to him. He put his arms around her and gazed with a sort of numbed emotion into her great dark eyes. Those eyes were wells of simplicity, love, fidelity, but below all that there were depths of unmeasured and unmeasuring passion that gave all and demanded all.

CHAPTER XIV

COLLINGEFORD gave a sigh of relief when he saw what manner of place was Maple House. As they gathered around the great table for dinner he was the only stranger and he did not feel it. Nance was there with the faint smile of a mother that has just put her children to bed. Charley Stirling, teasing Clematis, tried to forget that Monday and the city were coming together. Mrs. J. Y., with Collingeford on her right and the Judge on her left, held quiet sway over the table and nodded reassuringly at the old Captain who was making gestures with his eyes to the effect that a whisky and soda should be immediately offered to the guest. J. Y., pretty gray by now, sat thoughtful, but kindly, at the other end of the table. Clem was beside him.

It was not until the men were sitting alone after the glass of port, in which all had drunk Collingeford's welcome to that house, that the Judge said casually, "Collingeford saw Alan in Africa."

"Eh! What?" said the Captain aroused to sudden interest. "What's that about Alan?"

"I ran across Alan Wayne in Africa," said Collingeford, smiling. "Do you want me to tell you about it?"

Nance called Charley Stirling out. "You shirker," she said, "come and sit with me in the hammock."

"Collingeford was just going to tell about meeting Alan in Africa," said Charley indignantly. And then Nance said "Oh!" and wanted to send him back but he would n't go.

"Yes," grunted the Captain in reply to Collingeford's question and J. Y. nodded as he caught the young man's eye. "Wish you would," he said and leaned forward, his elbows on the table.

Collingeford was one of those men who are sensitive to men. His vocabulary did not run to piffle but he loved an understanding ear. He looked at the Judge's keen but restful face, at the Captain's glaring eyes, which somehow had assumed a kindly glint, at J. Y.'s rugged figure, suddenly grown tense, and he knew that Alan Wayne was near to the hearts of these three. He fingered his wine glass. "If I was one of those men," he began, looking at nobody, "who dislike Ten Percent Wayne I would n't tell you about him. But I'm not. It took me only two hours to get over hating him and those two hours were spent in a broiling sun at the wrong end of a half-finished bridge.

"Prince Bodsky and I were on *shikari*. We were headed home after a long and unsuccessful shoot in new country and we were as sore and tired and bored with the life of the wild as two old-timers ever get. On the day I'm telling you about we were trekking up a river gorge to a crossing. After lunch and the long rest we still had ten miles to go to cross and it did n't help things to know that once over we had to come straight

back on the other side. During the first hour's march in the afternoon we heard the strangest sound that ever those wilds gave forth. It was like hammering on steel but we refused to believe our ears until a sudden curve brought us bang up against the indisputable fact of a girder-bridge in the throes of construction. Before the thought of the sacrilege to the game country — before we could see in this noisy monstrosity the root of our recent bad luck — came the glad thought that we did n't have to do ten miles up that gorge and ten back. We would have whooped except that men don't whoop in Africa — it scares the game.

"I said the bridge was in the throes of construction. It was just that. Its two long girders, reaching from brink to brink, with their spidery trusses hanging underneath, fairly swarmed with sweating figures, and the figures were black. It was that that brought us to a full stop and just when our eyes were fixed with the intensity of discovery, one of the workers looked up, saw us, relaxed and gave the loud grunt which stands in Landin for 'Just look at that!' in English.

"The babbling and hammering around him ceased, but while he still stared at us, we saw a veritable apparition. A white man, hung between heaven and the depths of the gorge, was racing along the top of the slippery girder. His helmet blew off, hung poised, and then plunged in long tacking sweeps. The man was dressed in a cotton shirt, white trousers and thick woolen socks. No boots. Of course, I did n't notice all that till afterwards. In his hand he carried a *sjambok*. Suddenly the staring darky seemed to feel him coming

but, before he could turn, the sjambok quirt came down with the clinging sting of hide on flesh. We saw the blood spurt. The negro toppled without a cry. He fell inside, caught on a truss, clung, and finally with a struggle drew himself up on to a stringer. A shout of laughter went up from his fellows. Bodsky and I had heard it often — the laugh of the African for his brother in pain. And then they fell to work again. The black with the blood trickling off his back rested long enough to get his breath and then climbed back to his place on the girder. He was grinning. Don't ask me to explain it. Men have died trying to explain Africa.

"The white man had stopped and half turned. He stood, a little straddling, on the girder, and switched the sjambok to and fro. His eyes were blazing. From his lips dropped a patter of all the vile words in Landin, Swahili and half-a-dozen other dialects,— the words that a white man learns first if he listens to natives. The jargon seemed to incite the blacks. They worked as clumsily as ever but harder. They started to sing, as the African does when he's getting up a special burst of speed. Then the white man walked off the girder on our side, out of the way. 'Now's our time,' I whispered to Bodsky. He shook his head slowly from side to side but I was already under way. I walked up to the white man and asked him if he could let us across. He glanced around as if he had n't seen our outfit till that moment and then he looked me square in the eyes. 'We knock off at six,' he said, and that was all.

"I turned back. I'd been angry before but never as angry as that. Bodsky was already getting up the

fly of a tent. 'I saw it coming,' he said with his quiet little laugh that you never hear when there's anything to laugh at. 'Look here, Bodsky,' I said, 'let's walk to the old crossing.' And he answered, 'My dear chap, I'm going to sit right here. I would n't miss this for a shot at elephant. That man is Ten Percent Wayne.'

"Where'd you meet him?' I asked.

"Never met him,' said Bodsky, 'but I've heard of him.' So had I. We sat down together under the fly on a couple of loads and propped two whiskies-and-warm-water on another load in front of us and watched Wayne while Wayne watched his men.

"Suppose we offer him a drink,' I said and ran the sweat off my eyebrows with my finger.

"Bodsky looked at me pityingly. 'So you want to get burned again. Does that man look to you as though he was thinking about a drink? Well, let me tell you he is n't. Every bit of him is thinking about that bridge every minute. God! I have n't seen men driven like that since I was a boy. Once more there's something new in Africa! And I've never seen a man drive himself like that, anywhere.' All the Mongolian and Tatar that is said to lurk in every Russian seemed to be leaking out of Bodsky's narrowed eyes.

"We sat there and drank and smoked and sweated, and I sulked. Every once in a while Bodsky would say something. First it was: 'Those boys are from the South. Must have brought them with him.' Then it was: 'He knows something about the sun. He keeps his head in the shade-spot from that lonely palm.' And

finally: 'Collingeford, I never despised your intellect before. What are you sulking for? Can't you see what's up? Can't you understand that if a man will stand for two hours shifting an inch at a time with the shade rather than disturb half-a-dozen niggers at work to go and get a helmet he is n't going to call those niggers off to let a couple of loafers like us crawl across his girders? What you and I are staring at is just plain common garden Work with a capital W, stark naked and ugly, but by God, it's great.'

"And right there I saw the light. To us two the mystery of Ten Percent Wayne was revealed. He could drive men. He could make bricks without straw. While work was on, nothing else mattered. Right and wrong were measured by the needs of that bridge and death was too good for the shirker. And with the light I forgot the brute in the man tearing along the dizzy height of the girder to lash a loafer and only remembered that he had risked his life to avenge just one moment stolen from the day's work."

The stem of Collingeford's wine glass snapped between his fingers. "I'm sorry," he said, laying the pieces aside. He smiled a little nervously on the three tense faces before him. "I don't tell that story often. It goes too deep. Not everybody understands. Some people call Wayne no better than a murderer; but I'm not one of them. And Bodsky says there have been a lot of murderers he'd like to take to his club."

"J. Y., there's somebody listening at the door," said the Captain. "Been there some time."

J. Y. swung around and threw open the door. He

sprang forward and caught Clem in the act of flight. He brought her back into the room and sat down, holding her upright beside him. J. Y. was proud and for a moment Collingeford's presence galled him. "What were you doing, Clem?" he asked.

Clematis was in that degree of embarrassment and disarray which makes lovely youth a shade more lovely. Her brown hair was tumbled about her face and down her back. Her cheeks were flushed and her thin white neck seemed to tremble above the deep red of her slightly yoked frock. Her lips were moist and parted in excitement. She was sixteen and beautiful beyond the reach of hackneyed phrases. The four men fixed their eyes upon her, and she dropped hers. "I was eavesdropping," she said in a voice that was very low but clear.

"Why, Clem!" said J. Y. gravely.

Clem looked around on the four men. She did not seem afraid. Unconsciously they waited for her to go on, and she did. "Mr. Collingeford was telling about Alan. I heard Charley say he was going to. I shall always eavesdrop when any one tells about Alan."

For a second her auditors were stunned by the audacity. Collingeford's face was the first to light up and his hand came down on the table with a bang. "Bully for you, young 'un!" he cried and his clear laugh could be heard on the lawn. Before it was over, the Judge joined in, the Captain grunted his merriest grunt and J. Y. patted Clem's shoulder and smiled.

Clem was of the salt of the earth among womankind — the kind that waits to weep till the battle is over and then becomes a thousand times more dear in her weak-

ness. Her big eyes had been welling with tears and now they jumped the barrier just as Nance rushed in and cried, "*What* are you all laughing at?" Then she caught sight of Clem. From her she looked around on the men. "You four big hulking brutes," she said. "Come to me, Clem, you darling. What have they been doing to you? There, there, don't cry. Men are silly things. What if they did laugh at you?"

Clem was sobbing on Nance's shoulder. "It is n't that," she gasped. "I don't — mind — that! But Mr. Collingeford ca-called me a 'young one.'"

The three gray-heads kept their faces with difficulty. Collingeford leaped to his feet. "My dear young lady — Miss Clematis —" he stammered, "my word, now! I did n't mean it. Swear I did n't. I'll do anything if you'll only stop crying. Do stop and listen to me. I'll grovel."

It took him an hour to make his peace.

CHAPTER XV

MANY they were who drank at the fountain of hospitality in Maple House and to all, quiet Mrs. J. Y. held out the measured cup of welcome with impartial hand. But once in a while one came who made the rare appeal to the heart. Such a one was Collingeford. For all his wanderings, his roughing, and his occasional regression to city drawing-rooms and ultra-country houses, Collingeford fitted into the Hill — he belonged.

On Sunday night they were gathered on the lawn, all but Clem who sat at the piano beside an open window and poured her girl's voice out over the rippling keys. Her voice was thin and clear like a mountain brook hurrying over pebbles and like the brook it held the promise of coming fullness.

Collingeford sat by Mrs. J. Y., a little apart from the others. They had not talked. Mrs. J. Y. broke a long silence when she said, in a full low voice that somehow seemed related to Clem's thin trill. "We are very quiet here."

Collingeford looked thoughtfully at his glowing cigar-end. "The best parts of life are quiet," he answered.

"Do you really like it?" said Mrs. J. Y., almost shyly. "Englishmen of your class generally fall to the lot of our landed and chateauxed."

"My dear Mrs. Wayne," said Collingeford, "I've been sitting here in a really troubled silence trying to think out how to ask you to make it a week for me instead of a week-end."

Mrs. J. Y.'s laugh was happy but low. It did not disturb the others. Collingeford went on. "I know America pretty well for an Englishman. I thought I had done the whole country, from Albuquerque to Newport. But you are right. When we're not roughing it out West, we visiting Englishmen are pretty apt to be rubbing up against the gilded high-lights of the landed and the chateauxed. This"—Collingeford waved his cigar to embrace the whole of Red Hill—"is something new to me—and old. It's the sort of thing Englishmen think of when they are far from home. I have never seen it before in America."

"And yet," said Mrs. J. Y., "there are thousands of quiet homes in America just like it in spirit. In spite of all our divorces—all our national linen-washing in public—our homes are to-day what they always have been, the backbone of the country. The social world is in turmoil everywhere and America is in the throes no less than England. Our backbone is under a strain and some think it is breaking, but I don't." She turned her soft eyes on Collingeford and smiled. "There," she added, "I have been polemic but one seldom has the chance to spread the good fame of one's country. I am glad you can give us a week instead of a week-end."

Collingeford heard some one speak of Mrs. Lansing and he said to Mrs. J. Y., "I know a Mrs. Lansing—

a beautiful and scintillating young person — the sort of effervescence that flies over to Europe and becomes the dismay of our smart women and the fate of many men."

Mrs. J. Y. for a second was puzzled. "That is n't Mrs. Lansing — it's Mrs. Gerry you're thinking of. Mrs. Lansing is her mother-in-law. They live next door."

The next morning, with Clem as cicerone, Collingeford went over to The Firs to pay his respects to Alix. They found her under the trees.

"How do you do?" said Alix. "The Honorable Percy, is n't it?"

"What a memory you have for trifles," said Collingeford, laughing. "May I sit down?"

"Do," said Alix. She was perched in the middle of a garden seat. On each side of her were piled various stuffs and all the paraphernalia of the sewing circle. Collingeford sat down before her and stared. Clem had gone off in search of game more to her taste. Alix seemed to him very small. He felt the change in her before he could fix in what it lay. She seemed still and restful in spite of her flying fingers. Spiritually still. Her eyes, glancing at him between stitches, were amused and grave at the same time.

"Doll's clothes?" said Collingeford, waving at a beribboned morsel.

"No," said Alix.

Collingeford stared a little longer and then he broke out with, "Look here, what have you done with her? Over there, the young Mrs. Lansing — spice, deviltry, scintillation and wit — blinding. Over here, Mrs.

Gerry — demure and industrious. Don't tell me you have gone in for the Quaker pose, but please tell me which is the *poseuse*; you now or the other one."

Alix laughed. "I'm just me now, minus the deviltry and all that. Come, I'll show you what I've done with it."

They threaded the trees and came upon a mighty bower, half sun, half shade, where in the midst of a nurse and Clem and many toys a baby was enthroned on a rug. "There you are," said Alix. "There's my spice, deviltry, scintillation and wit all done into one rolly-poly."

"Well, I'm blown," said Collingeford, advancing cautiously on the young monarch. "Do you want me to — to feel him or say anything about his looks? I'll have to think a minute if you do."

"Booby," said Alix, "come away."

But Collingeford seemed fascinated. He squatted on the rug and poked the monarch's ribs. Nurse, mother and Clem flew to the rescue, but to their amazement the monarch did not bellow. He appropriated Collingeford's finger. "I wonder if he'd mind if I called him a 'young 'un,'" soliloquized the attacking giant. Then he pulled the baby's leg. "When he grows up tell him I was the first man to pull his leg. My word, he has n't a bone in his body, not even a tooth."

"Silly," said Clem, "of course not."

"What are you staring at him that way for?" said Alix. "Can a baby make you think? A penny for them."

"I was just thinking," said Collingeford gravely, "that a baby is positively the only thing I've never eaten."

A horrified silence greeted this remark. The nurse was the first to recover. She strode forward, gathered up the baby and marched away. Alix and Clem fixed their eyes on Collingeford. He slowly withered and drew back.

Then the Judge and Mrs. Lansing came out to them. Collingeford was introduced. Mrs. Lansing turned to Alix. "Have you asked Mr. Collingeford to stay to lunch? The Judge has asked himself."

"No, Mother," said Alix. "I'm afraid we could n't give the Hon. Percy anything new to eat. He says —"

"My dear Mrs. Lansing," interrupted Collingeford, "it's all a mistake. I positively loathe eating new things, no matter how delicious and rosy and blue-eyed they look."

"Are you speaking of cabbages?" inquired the Judge.

"No, babies," said Clem. "He wanted to eat the baby."

Mrs. Lansing laughed. "I don't blame him," she said. "I've often wanted to eat him myself."

Collingeford spent a good deal of his week at The Firs. Clem went to see the baby daily as a matter of course and he went along, as he said himself, as another matter of course. Clem talked to the baby, Collingeford to Alix. He said to her one day, "I've read in books about babies doing this sort of thing to gad-about —"

"Gad-about," interrupted Alix, "is just, but cruel."

"Well, butterflies," compromised Collingeford. "But I never believed it really happened."

"Oh," said Alix, "it was n't the baby. Not altogether. You see, Mr. Collingeford, Gerry Lansing — I'm Mrs. Gerry — disappeared over a year ago — before the baby came. He thought I did n't love him. I might as well tell you all about it. I believe in telling things. Mystery is always more dangerous than truth; it gives such a lead to imagination."

So she told him and Collingeford listened, interested. At the end he said nothing. Alix looked at his thoughtful face. "What do you think? Is n't there a chance? Don't you think he's possibly — probably alive?"

The Judge was not there to hear the meek appeal of faith for comfort. Collingeford met Alix' eyes frankly. "If I were you," he said, "I would probably believe as you do. I've met too many dead men in Piccadilly looking uncommonly well ever to say that a man is dead because he's disappeared. Then there's the other side of it. Bodsky says a man is never dead while there's anybody left that loves him."

"The Judge told me about Bodsky. He's the man that said there had been lots of murderers he'd like to take to his club. He must be worth while. I'd like to talk to him."

"I don't suppose," said Collingeford absently, "that Bodsky has talked to a woman since he killed his mistress."

Alix started and looked up from her work. "Don't you think you had better come back — and bring the talk back with you?"

It was Collingeford's turn to start. "I beg your pardon," he said. "You are right, I was in another world. Only you mustn't get a wrong impression. Everybody says it was an accident — except Bodsky. He has never said anything."

CHAPTER XVI

ALAN WAYNE had been away for a year. He had not returned from Montreal but had gone on from there to work in South America and, later, to Africa.

He had been in town for several days when he met the Judge one afternoon in November on the Avenue.

"Judge," he said without preamble, "what's this I hear about Gerry disappearing."

"It's true," said the Judge and added grimly, "he disappeared the day you went to Montreal."

Alan colored and his face turned grave. "I am sorry," he said. "I did n't know it."

"Sorry for what?" asked the Judge, but Alan refused the opening and the Judge hardly regretted it. They were not in tune and he felt it. His heart was heavy over Alan for his own sake. He had broken what the Judge had long revered as a charmed circle. He had exiled himself from that which should have been dearer to him than his heart's desire. The Judge wondered if he realized it. "You're not going out to Red Hill?" he asked, trying to make the question casual.

Alan glanced at him sharply. What was the Judge after? "No," he said after a pause, "I shall not break the communal coma of Red Hill for some time. I'm

off again. McDale & McDale have loaned me to Ellinson's. I've become a sort of *poohbah* on construction in Africa. They get a premium for lending me."

Alan's speech habitually drawled except for an occasional retort that came like the crack of a whip. The Judge looked him over curiously. Alan's dress was almost too refined. His person was as well cared for as a woman's. Every detail about him was a studied negation of work, utility, service. The Judge thought of Collingford's story and wondered.

They walked in silence for some time and then Alan took his leave. The Judge followed his erect figure with solemn eyes. Alan had deteriorated. One cannot be the fly in the amber of more than one woman's memory without clouding one's own soul, and a clouded soul has its peculiar circumambieny which the clean can feel. The Judge felt it in Alan and winced.

If Alan did not go to the Hill, the Hill, in certain measure, came to Alan. The next afternoon found the Captain once more established in his chair in a window at the club with Alan beside him. The Captain had not changed. His hair was in the same state of white insurgency, his eyes bulged in the same old way, and he still puffed when he talked. His garb was identical and awakened the usual interest in the passing gamin.

"You'll never grow old, sir," said Alan.

"Old!" said the Captain. "Huh, I grew old before you were born." The Captain spoke with pride. He straightened his bullet head and poised a tot of whisky with a steady hand. "What did I tell you?" he said into space.

"How's that, sir?"

"What did I tell you," repeated the Captain swinging around his eyes, "about women?"

Alan flushed angrily. He had no retort for the old man. He sat sullenly silent.

The Captain colored too. "That's right," he said with a surprising touch of choler. "Sulk. Every badly broken colt sulks at the grip of the bit. What you need, young man, is a touch of the whip and you're going to get it."

And then the old man revealed a surprising knowledge of words that could lash. At first Alan was indifferent, then amazed, and finally recognized himself beaten at his own game. He came out of that interview thoroughly chastened and with an altogether new respect for the old Captain. No one knew better than Alan that it took a special brand of courage to whip him with words but the Captain had not stopped to stuff his own ears with cotton wool before engaging the enemy. He had risked all in one liquid, stinging, overwhelming volley and he had won.

The Captain's code was peculiar, to say the least, and held the passionate pilgrim in ample regard but, as he pointed out to Alan, it was a code of honor. It played a game within rules. He further remarked that the hawk was a bird of evil repute but personally he preferred him to the eagle that fouls its own nest. There were other pregnant phrases that hung in Alan's mind for some time and half awakened him to a realization of where he stood. Many a man, propped up by the sustaining atmosphere of a narrow world, has passed

merciless judgment on such sins as Alan's — metal, unproved, sitting in judgment over the bar that twists in the flame. But the Captain was not one of the world's confident army of the untested. He had roamed the high seas of pleasure as well as the ocean wave. Alan would have struck back at a saint but he took chastisement from the old sinner with good grace.

Alan left the Captain and presented himself at the downtown offices of J. Y. Wayne & Co. They were expecting him and he was shown in to his uncle immediately, to the exasperation of several pompous, waiting clients. It was the first time that uncle and nephew had been face to face since their memorable interview at Maple House.

J. Y. Wayne was aging. He had lived hard and showed it, but there was no weakness in his age and he met Alan without compromise. He nodded toward a chair but did not offer his hand. When he spoke his voice was low and modulated to the tone of business. "I wanted to see you to tell you that you have overpaid your account with me. The balance has been put to your credit. You can see the cashier about that. I want to tell you, too, that I have made too much money myself to admire a surprising capacity in that direction in any one else.

"Don't think that I don't appreciate the significance of your wiping out a debt which you incurred unwittingly. I can see that you had to do it because a Wayne must carry his head high in his own eyes. But —" and here J. Y.'s eyes left his nephew's expressionless face and looked vaguely into the shadows of the room. His

voice took a lower key. "With all your sacrifice to pride you have failed in pride. You have not been proud in the things that count."

J. Y.'s voice fell still lower. His words hung and dropped in the silence of the room like the far-away throb of a great bell on a still night. "Yesterday Clem was crying because you had not come to the house. I try to think, Alan, that it's because Clem is there that you have not come. If I could think that—" J. Y.'s eyes came slowly back to Alan's face. A dull red was burning there. J. Y. went on, "Shame is a precious thing to a man. Different creeds — different circumstances — carry us to various lengths. Ethics are elastic to-day as never before but, as long as shame holds a bit of ground in a man's battlefield, he can win back to any height."

For a long minute there was silence, then on a common impulse they both arose. Alan's eyes were wide open and moist. He held out his hand and J. Y. gripped it. It was their whole farewell.

Back in his rooms Alan sat down and wrote to Clem; "Dear Clem: We are all two people. Uncle J. Y. cut his other half off about thirty years ago and left it behind. The Judge has *his* other half locked up in a closet. He has never let it out at all. And so on, with every one of us. This sounds very funny to you now but some day when you are grown up you will catch your other self looking at you and then you will understand what I mean. I am two people too. The half of me that knows you and loves you and Red Hill and that you love has been away longer than the

rest of me. He only got back twenty minutes ago, and it is too late for him to come and see you because he and the rest of me are off to-morrow on another trip. But he wants you to know that he is awfully sorry to have missed you. Next time I shall bring him with me, I hope, and I 'll send him to you the day we arrive."

CHAPTER XVII

THERE is no stronger proof of man's evolution than his adaptability,—his power of attainment through the material at hand, however elementary. From the very beginning, the necessities of his new life called to Gerry's dormant instincts. For the first week he would not hear. The past loosens its tendrils slowly. He was listless and loafed restlessly about the house. The two darkies worked for his well-being, the two white women waited on him hand and foot. At first it was lulling; then it was wearying. He began to wander from the house.

But the week had not been altogether lost. He had gathered desultory but primitive information. Occasional reoccurring words began to be more than mere sounds. The girl's name was Margarita. The wrinkled little woman was her aunt, Dona Maria. The two darkies were lingering relics of slave days. They had been born here. They had gone with emancipation, but they had come back. The name of the plantation was Fazenda Flores. To them it was the world. They had wandered out of it hand in hand with liberty but they had come back because freedom was here. They needed some one to serve. Margarita had long been an orphan. The place was hers and had once been rich. But before her day water had become scarce. The place

was uncared for and had fallen into its present ruin. It was well, she said, for if she had been rich suitors would have searched her out long since. She was eighteen. She had been a woman for years!

These things, some of them distinct, some only half-formed impressions, ran in Gerry's head as he wandered over the fazenda. It had once been rich, why was it not rich now? Fertility sprang to his view on every side save one. This was the gentle slope away from the river and behind the house. Even here he discovered hummocks in alignment, vague traces of the careful tilling of another time. He climbed the slope till he came to a depression running parallel to the river. It made a line and beyond that line was desert untamed. Cactus and thorn dotted its barren soil. Gerry followed the depression down to its end, then turned back and followed it up. It wandered among rocks and hillocks to a natural cleft in the banks of the great river.

The cleft was long and straight and at its end he saw the turmoil of the rushing current. The water surged up the cleft to the gentle slope of sand at his feet in an eternal come and go. What a place for a bath, he thought, and then found Margarita panting beside him. She had followed him. She had been running. She held one hand to her heart and with the other clutched his arm. When she had got her breath she motioned him to stand still. Then she picked up a large stone and, running down the hard sand bank behind a receding wave, dropped it and ran back. The water rushed after her, picked up the stone, played with

it, and then the terrific undertow carried it whirling down the cleft and away. Gerry smiled and nodded his thanks and comprehension.

He climbed a point of rock and gazed around him. Far down to the left gleamed the old plantation house in the midst of its waste lands. His eye followed the long depression and he began to understand many things. The ruin was a young ruin like himself. In itself it contained the seeds of rejuvenescence. It had been robbed of its talisman and its talisman was water. Tons of water flowed past it and left it thirsting for drops. Irrigation is coeval with the birth of civilization. It had been here in this depression, lived, and passed away before he and the girl were born. He tried to explain to her what once had been, but she shrugged her shoulders. She was not interested; she did not understand. Together they walked back to the house. Gerry was silent and thoughtful. He saw a vision of what Fazenda Flores had once been, what work could make it again.

The following day he rooted out two rusty spades from the debris in the old mill, fitted new handles to them and took the old darky, Bonifacio by name, off with him to the depression. They began the long task of digging out the silt of years. Day after day, week after week, they clung to the monotonous work. The darky worked like an automaton. Work in itself to him was nothing beyond the path to food and rest at night. Labor made no demands on courage — it had no end, no goal. But Gerry's labor was dignified by conscious effort. His eyes were not in the ditch but

on the vision he had seen of what Fazenda Flores might be. He had fixed his errant soul on a goal. The essence of slavery is older than any bonds wrought by man. The white man and the black in the ditch were its parable. The dignity and the shame of labor were side by side, paradoxically yoked to the same task.

Margarita and her aunt looked on and smiled and joy began to settle on the girl. During Gerry's first restless week she had steeled herself each night to the thought that she would wake to find him gone. But now he was taking root. It amused him to dig. Well, let him dig. There was no end to digging.

Gerry occasionally varied the work of digging with making some knick-knack for the house. The twisted limbs of trees became benches to supplant the rickety chairs, clumsily patched and totally inadequate to his weight. In the same way he made the massive frame of a bed and Bonifacio remembered an art and filled in the frame with plaited thongs. Work inspires emulation. The women got out their store of cloth. They made clothes for Gerry and fitted out the new bed. Pillows and mattress were stuffed with dry bur-mari-golds that faintly scented the whole room. With each achievement the somber house seemed to take a step toward gaiety. Ruin and dilapidation put forth green shoots. The gaiety was reflected in the household. They were united in achievement. Quiet smiles were their reward to each other and sometimes a burst of wonder as when Gerry found some old bottles and with the aid of a bit of string cut them into serviceable mugs.

Margarita was happy. Her cup was full. All the

dreams of her girlhood were fulfilled in Gerry. A silent and strange lover, but a man — such a man as she had dreamed of but never seen. To herself she sang the old songs he should have sung to her and then laughed as he nodded mild approval.

One evening he sat on a bench on the veranda, fitting a handle into a dipper made of a cocoanut-shell. Margarita sat on the steps at his feet. She stayed herself on her hands and leaning back gazed on the starry sky and sang:

Brunette, Brunette,
Thy sparkling eyes,
To grace a world,
Have robbed the skies.
They are two stars,
That shine and see.
Brunette, Brunette,
Have pity on me!

Her young voice bubbled up from a full heart. It was joy bubbling from a well of happiness.

Brunette, Brunette,
Those dreaming eyes,
Your eyes, Brunette,
They are my skies.
They are my sins,
Such eyes as they,
I look and sin,
And then I pray!

She leaned back further and further until she sank against his knees. He stooped over her. She threw up her arms around his neck, locked her hands and drew him down. He kissed her lips and sighed.

"Ah, do not sigh," she wailed. "Laugh! Laugh but once!"

CHAPTER XVIII

GERRY did not grudge the months of toil in the ditch. As he worked he thought and planned. This ditch was the very real foundation for the attainment of his vision. Deep and strong and carefully graded it must be before he cleared the sand barrier to the river's surge. The ditch was slow of growth but there was something about it which held his faith. It was rugged and elemental. It was the ugly source of a coming resurrection.

When it was all but done he took Margarita and showed her his handiwork. He pointed out the little sluiceways, each with its primitive gate, a heavy log hinged on a thole-pin with a prop to hold it up and a stone to weight it when down. On the Fazenda side were innumerable little trenches that stretched down into the valley.

But not until he led her to the cleft in the river gorge and showed her that half an hour's work on the sand barrier would let the river into the great ditch did she understand. And then she caught his arm and burst into violent protest and pleading. "No, no," she cried, "you shall not do it. You shall not let in the river. The river is terrible. You must not play with it. It does not understand. You think it will do as you wish but it will not. Oh, if you must, please,

please play with it below the rapids. There it is kinder. It lets one bathe. It lets one wash clothes."

Gerry got over his astonishment and laughed. Then he soothed her. Already the simpler phrases of her tongue came easily from his lips. He told her that she was foolish and a little coward. She must watch and see how tame the river would be. As he talked a strange figure approached on the other side of the ditch.

"Father Mathias," said Margarita, "it is Father Mathias. He will help me dissuade you."

Gerry looked with awe on the spectacle presented by the newcomer. An old man, rubicund of face, his flat, wide-brimmed hat pushed well back on his gray head, was ambling towards them on a mule. A long cassock, half unbuttoned and looped about his waist, was supplemented by black trousers and flaring riding boots. Over his head for protection against the sun he held an enormous white cotton umbrella lined with green. The mule stopped abruptly on the very brink of the ditch. The old priest shot off and rolled down the bank to the bottom. The mule stood still, his fore legs slightly straddled; his pose was one of mild surprise.

Before Gerry could jump into the ditch the priest had scrambled to his feet.

"Blessing, Father," said Margarita, gravely.

"God bless thee, daughter," replied the priest calmly, "but not this accursed ditch. My hands are soiled, nay, worse, scratched!" With the help of Gerry's strong grip he climbed to the top of the bank on which they stood. He smiled on them benignantly. "A

strange welcome to the old Father, children. What devil dug this pit for rectitude?"

"Oh, Father," cried Margarita, "curse the ditch if you will, but do not call my man a devil. Look at him. Is he not good to see? I found him at the river. He is mine."

Gerry smiled at the girl then at the priest. The priest smiled back. "Thou didst find him at the river, thou daughter of Pharaoh!" cried the priest, a twinkle in his eye. "A fine babe. May he grow to be a leader of his people."

Together they walked down to the house. Bonifacio was despatched to fetch the mule and then Margarita drew the old priest into a vacant room. Over her shoulder she said to Gerry, "I am going to confess."

Gerry flushed and nodded. He wished that he could subject his own conscience to so simple a rite. He walked about nervously, wondering what the priest would have to say to him when he came out. But when Margarita and Father Mathias finally emerged they were already talking of other things. The household gathered in the kitchen and there the old Father retailed the gossip of a vast country-side.

It was almost a year since he had visited this offshoot of his parish and he had much to tell. The Father was a connoisseur in gossip for women. He touched lightly on tragedies and moral slips in his community but dwelt at length on funerals, births, marriages, where rain had fallen and where it had not, the success or failure of each of the great church fêtes and all kindred subjects. This was the link, mused

Gerry, that joined Fazenda Flores to the world and the world to Fazenda Flores.

The next morning Gerry was up early. He was excited. From this day the ditch, the parched slope, the valley would know thirst no more. With the long dry season even the green bottoms had begun to wilt. He called Bonifacio and as they started off Father Mathias and Margarita joined them.

"You will not let him do it, Father?" the girl was saying. "The ditch is accursed. You yourself have cursed it."

"That was but a playful anathema," said the priest, smiling at the recollection of his introduction to the ditch. "Stay thou here, child. Perhaps I shall find that to solemnly bless in your man's ditch."

The girl went slowly back to the house and the priest walked on with Gerry. "Irrigation," he began, "is destined to be the salvation of all this country. Water, we have in plenty; but it rushes by in great rivers leaving the overhanging land thirsty. I picture all these barren cliffs leaning over, longing for a drink. Where else can you see cactus overhanging torrents and cattle starving to death on a river bank?"

Gerry was surprised. "So you bless my ditch?" he asked with a smile.

"Yes," replied the priest. He had dropped the "thou" that the church accords her children only. He talked like one man of the world to another. "Your ditch, I can bless." Gerry had led him to the point of rock from which he had first conceived his vision. "You have not been a slave to haste," continued the

priest. "The curse of my people is that they toil to avoid work but you have worked to avoid toil."

"It is true," said Gerry, "though I had never thought it out. I am striving to make nature do the toiling. Man, toiling alone, has always been a pigmy."

Under his direction Bonifacio was digging a great hole just at the back of the sand-bank. Gerry measured its capacity and finally called the old darky out. He jumped down on to the sand-bank himself and dug a small trench to the water. The river surged through it gently. Gerry climbed out. With each pulse of the come-and-go a wave rushed through the little trench, widening it and occasionally carrying away a block of the sand-bank into the hole. Gradually, then in rapid progression, the barrier was leveled. The hole filled with water that rose till it began to trickle down the long length of the ditch. They followed the tiny stream. Soon it came in rushing surges. Hours passed. Bonifacio slept, but Gerry and the priest had forgotten time. The ditch filled. The water started to flow back into the river. Along all its length the ditch held. Gerry heaved a great sigh. The priest gave him his hand.

"Wonderfully graded," he said. "You are a born engineer."

Gerry started opening the sluice gates, the lowest first. The water gurgled out into the main trench and from there was distributed. At first the thirsty soil swallowed it greedily but gradually the rills stretched further and further down into the valley. Under the blazing sun they looked like streams of molten silver and gold.

Margarita came running up to them from the house. She looked reproachfully at Father Mathias. Gerry put his arm around her and made her face the valley. The priest stretched out his arms and blessed the water. Then he looked at the girl and smiled. She smiled back at him but trouble was still in her eyes.

Gerry left them to start on the work of fitting the ponderous sluice-gate of hewn logs that he had prepared for the mouth of the great ditch. It was a triumph of ingenuity. He never could have evolved it without the aid of a giant ironwood wormscrew taken from the wreck of a cotton press. The screw was so heavy that he and Bonifacio could hardly carry it.

At the end of three days the great gate was installed. He and Bonifacio toiled like sailors at a capstan. They drove the heavy barrier down into the sand with a last turn of the screw and shut out the river. Margarita came and saw and was pleased.

CHAPTER XIX

UNDER the broad dome of a mango tree on the banks of an unnamed African river Alan Wayne had pitched his camp. The Selwyn tent and the projecting veranda fly were faded and stained. The bobbinet mosquito curtains were creamed with age and service. Two camp chairs and a collapsible table, battered but strong, were placed before the tent. Over one of the chairs hung a towel. On the ground squatted a take-down bath tub, half filled with water. In the deep shadow of the tree the pale green rot-proof canvas of the tent, the fly, the chairs and bath tub, gleamed almost white.

On the farther side of the great trunk of the tree was the master's kitchen, three stones and a half-circle of forked sticks driven into the ground. On the sticks hung a few pots and pans, a saddle of buck, bits of fat and a disreputable looking coffee-bag. Between the stones was a bed of coals. Before them crouched a red-fezzed Zanzibari.

From under a second tree, fifty yards away, came the dull, rhythmic pounding of wooden pestles in wooden mortars. The eye could just distinguish the glistening naked torsos of three blacks in motion. They were singing a barbarous chantey. At the pauses their arms went up and the pestles came down together

with a thud. The blacks were pounding the kaffir corn for the men's evening meal.

Down the river and almost out of sight a black, spidery construction reached out over the water — Alan's latest bridge. Men swarmed on it.

Six o'clock and there came the trill of a whistle. Suddenly the bridge was cleared. A babble of voices arose. There was a crackling of twigs, a shuffling of feet, here and there a high, excited cry, and then the men poured into camp. A din of talk, held in check for hours, arose. Glistening black bodies danced to jerky, fantastic steps. Songs, shouts and impatient cries to the cooks swelled the medley of sound. Through the camp stole the acrid odor of toiling Africa.

Behind the men marched the foreman, McDougal; behind him came Alan. At sight of him the Zanzibari sprang into action. He poured a tin of hot water into the bath tub and laid out an old flannel suit. Beside the suit he placed clean underwear, fresh socks and, on the ground, a pair of slippers.

Alan stripped, bathed and dressed. The Zanzibari handed him a cup of hot tea. By the time the tea was drunk the table was freshly laid and Alan sat down to a steaming bowl of broth, and dinner.

After dinner McDougal joined him for a smoke. For a full half hour they sat wordless. Darkness fell and brought out the lights of their fitfully glowing pipes. From the men's camp came a subdued chatter. The men were feeding. As they finished they lit fires — a fire for every little group. The smell of the wood fires triumphed over every other odor.

McDougal had met Alan first in a bare room at an African seaport. The room was furnished with a chair and a table. At the table sat Alan, busy with final estimates and plans for supplies for his little army. The interview was short. McDougal had asked for a job and Alan had answered, "Get out." McDougal had repeated his request and the rest of the story he told the next morning before the Resident Magistrate in the chair and Alan in the dock.

"Aweel, your honor, it was this way: I went into Mr. Wayne's office and asked him for worruk and he said, 'Get out.' I asked him again and he said, 'I'll give you two to get out — One — Two,' and with that he cooms on to the table and flying through the air. I had joost considered that it was best I should let him hit me first aince that I might break him with justice when he struck me face with both fists, and his knee in the pit of me stummick. And that's all, your honor, savin' the Kaffir that I woke up to find watering me and a rose bush, turrrn by turrrn aboot."

"I suppose," said the Magistrate, covering his twitching mouth with his hand, "that was the Kaffir I signed a hospital pass for last night."

"It may weel be," replied McDougal dreamily, "It may weel be."

"Well, McDougal, I think this is a matter that can be settled out of court —"

McDougal held up a vast hand in interruption. "Begging your pardon, your honor, there'll be nae settling of this matter out of coort between Mr. Wayne and mysel'. Aince is enough."

Justice and the prisoner in the dock surrendered to laughter. McDougal stood grave and unperturbed.

"What I meant," said the Magistrate when he recovered, "is that Mr. Wayne will probably give you a job and call it all square."

"That's it," said Alan.

"I asked Mr. Wayne for worruk and if it's worruk he is giving me I'll nae be denying it is a fair answer," replied McDougal, and forthwith became Ten Percent Wayne's gang-boss and understudy in the art of driving men with both fists and a knee.

McDougal knocked out his third pipe. "The Deil of a country is this," he said; "in the seas of it a life-preserver holds you up handy for sharks and in the rivers does swimming save your life? Nae. It gives you a meal to the crocs."

They had lost a black that day. He had slipped from the bridge into the water. He had started to swim to shore and then suddenly disappeared in a swirl.

Conversationally, McDougal limited himself to a sentence a day in which he summed up the one event that had struck him as worthy of notice. Having delivered himself of his observation for the night he lit his pipe once more and relapsed into silence.

McDougal's was a companionable silence. Alan could feel him sitting there in the dark, raw-boned and dour but ready at the word of command.

It was after eight when Alan called for a light and drew from a worn letter case the correspondence that a runner from the coast had brought in that day. He glanced over official communications, blue prints and

business letters and stuffed them back into the leather case. One fat letter, note-paper size, remained.

"McDougal," said Alan, "hush up the camp — tell 'em it's nine o'clock."

McDougal arose and picking up a big stick strode over towards the men. The stick was so big that he had never had to use it. At the mere sight of it the men desisted from clamor, dance and horse-play.

Alan drew the fat letter from its envelope and for the second time read, "Dear Alan: As you see, this is from New York. We came down yesterday. All summer I have been watching for my second self because I'm just about grown up now — outside, I mean, — inside is different somehow — and three days before we left I really caught her looking at me while I was sitting on the old stone bench down by the pond.

"I jumped up and ran after her all the way down Long Lane and up the Low Road to where the red cow broke her leg that time and there I *lost* her. I did n't find her again and had to come away without her and now I feel so queer — sort of half-y, just like you.

"Somehow I can't blame her. She did n't want to leave the Hill in the Gorgeous Month so she just stayed behind. Do you remember —

This is the gorgeous month when leafy fires
Mount to the gods in myriad summer pyres . . . ?

"A few hours ago when I was doing my mile on the Avenue I almost got run down and Mam'selle gave me an awful scolding for being so absent-minded. It was

a true word. I was just that — absent-minded — because my mind was off chasing that other half. I could see her so plainly! She had on the cinnamon linen with the white collar and tabs — but I forget — you don't know it. She was bare-headed and her feet and skirt were wet because it had been drizzling before the sun came out in an evening salute to the flaming trees. I saw her tumble down jumping the stone wall in the bushes at the foot of old Bald Head and then some one picked her up, helped her over and together they climbed to the top. It was your other half. Have you missed him? I liked the way he treated mine. Just like a boy. Somehow he's younger than you and sometimes he laughs right out.

"Then I saw her get home, change her things and — shall I tell you? — fish out the old doll — yes — Bessy. I left her telling Bessy one of those stories you used to call Tales of the Very Real Things That Are Not. Remember? And then I came back and there I was on the Avenue with people staring at me more than they ever have before. I suppose it was because I was out of breath with chasing in my mind. Good-by, Alan. Clem."

Alan sat in the circle of light from the hanging lamp and stared into the darkness. From the river came the sound of sucking mud, then a heavy tread. A monster hippo blundered through the bushes in search of food. On the other side of the tree trunk the Zanzibari was snoring. The fires were burning out at the men's camp. Once more the odor of their bodies hung in the air.

Alan arose and dragged his chair to the outer edge of the mango tree. He sat down and with hands locked and elbows on knees gave himself up to memory. He forgot the sounds and smells of Africa, the black-green of over-hanging leaves, the black shadows of the swirling river, the black-bronze of the men about him. For an hour he tore himself away from the black world to wander over the beloved hills in New England where summer dies in a burst of light.

Red Hill, crowned with mountain-ash, called to his spirit as a torch in the night to a lost wanderer. The thirty months that had passed since last he saw its budding promise were swept away. He imagined those very budding leaves at the end of their course, the pale amber of the elms, the deep note of the steadfast firs, the flaunting fire of the brave maples.

Maple House arose before him, its lawn carpeted with dry leaves. From the leaves floated an incense, dusty, pungent. The cool shadows of the great, rambling house beckoned to him. Here is peace, here is rest, they seemed to cry. The memory of home gripped him, held him and soothed him. His head nodded and he slept only to awake with a start, for he had dreamed that he had lost the way back forever.

CHAPTER XX

ONE day as Gerry was pottering about a log bridge he had thrown over his ditch, a shadow fell across his path and he looked up to find Father Mathias, mule, umbrella and all, looming over him.

"I am on the way back," said the priest, "and I have stopped to have a chat with you."

"Won't you come down to the house?" said Gerry. "Margarita will give you a warm welcome."

"And you?" said the priest, smiling.

"I?" said Gerry. "I am but a wayfarer. I can only welcome you to my ditch."

"What, again?" said the priest as he slid clumsily off his passive mule. With cassock still looped up about his waist he came to meet Gerry. "Let us sit down on this log," said the priest, "and you can listen to the water while I listen to you."

They made a strange picture sitting side by side on the twisted log. Gerry was looking more and more like a Greek god. His hair, close cropped by Margarita, seemed to have bronzed with his skin. The cotton jumper and trousers had molded themselves to his limbs. His body was trimmed down to perfect lines. When he moved one could see muscles rippling as though work were play. His eyes were deep and clear. They had forgotten the look of whisky. On his feet were

rawhide sandals. Like a native he had learned to keep them on with the aid of a leather button held between his toes. His feet were white. His face like his body was alive. He held his big palm-leaf hat in his hands, for he was under the shade of the priest's great cotton umbrella.

Father Mathias, too, had taken off his hat and laid it carefully on his pudgy knees. With a vast red bandana handkerchief he mopped his gray head, his glistening tonsure and his fat jowls. About him there was nothing in training except his eyes. They gleamed and flashed from a passive mask; they swept Gerry from head to toe. "Flesh is not *thy* burden, my son."

Gerry knew himself in the presence of a father confessor. He began to tell his story dreamily. In that blaze of tropical light, perched beside his own handiwork; a frocked priest at his side; a mule, with head and ears pendent, before him; and down in the valley, the plantation house, Margarita, the river,—it was hard to picture Alix. He seemed to be in the free swinging orbit of another sphere. He told a lucid story but as he spoke he seemed to see himself and Alix diminished by a greater perspective than mere time—flies buzzing under glass. Vaguely he felt that he must still love Alix were Alix of his life. But she was not. She belonged to a mechanism of life the whirring of whose tiny wheels drowned out the low tones of elemental things which, once heard, left no place in a man's heart for lesser sounds. Gerry did not picture himself as entranced by the simple life, but he felt subconsciously that while once Nature's music had seemed but the shrill-

ing of cicadae, matching the acute note of an artificial whirl, now it sang to him in the deep tones of a resonant organ — sang with him — for he felt that he was of the music, that his body was a vibrating, naked cord in a monster harp.

The priest did not watch him as he talked, but, when he had finished, turned and seemed to drill him with his piercing eyes. "It is well," he said. "Life has buffeted you that later you may buffet Life. But it is not with that distant future that I would meddle. To me you are only a sudden factor in the life of one of the most innocent of my flock. Some people have an exaggerated idea of innocence. Not I. Margarita is innocent to me. She has married you in her heart. Some day you will go away —" Gerry shook his head in denial but the priest resumed, "some day you will go away and it will kill her. But in the meantime you make her live a life of sin. Why do you? Why not marry her?"

Gerry looked around in surprise. "Marry her! Haven't I just told you that I am married?"

The priest shrugged his shoulders. "All that, my son, is locked in the confessional. Why make a mountain of a distant molehill? Need your two worlds ever clash? You lose nothing. You give peace to the girl who is ready to renounce the rights and privileges of Mother Church rather than say a word that might frighten you away. She made me swear that I would never breathe to you of marriage." Gerry smiled but the priest continued calmly, "the girl is all I am thinking of — the girl and the children."

"Children!" exclaimed Gerry. Years with Alix had relegated children to a state of remote contingency.

It was the priest's turn to smile. "Yes," he said, "children. They happen, somehow."

Gerry did not smile. He was trying to picture himself in relation to children.

"It would not be fair," continued Father Mathias, "to the children. This place is Margarita's. It was worth nothing without your ditch. It will soon be worth a great deal. Say you died — say you left her with children — they could not inherit. After all, it is a small thing for you to do. You and I will know the marriage is illegal, but it is big odds that the law will never know it."

"Where are your morals, Father?" said Gerry, smiling. "Do you counsel me to live a lie?"

The priest snapped his fat fingers. "In the balance against peace of mind, lies are feathers. Besides, we all live a lie anyway. Our ambition should be to live a big, kindly lie and not a mean, self-centered one. The ideal, the absolute in anything, is fleshless — bloodless. We speak as man to man, eh? Well, when years have spread out life behind you, you will look back and see this lesson; happiness contains content, but happiness is the enemy of content. They who pursue the greater may lose all; they who pursue the lesser sometimes obtain the whole. Behold my major and my minor premise and the conclusion is: The part is greater than the whole! Thus it is with life, my son. The part is always greater than the whole and a small lie may help on a great truth."

Gerry smiled at the Jesuitry. It appealed to him. It fitted in with the inverted order of things. He rose and held out his hand. "If children come," he said, "I will marry her."

The priest scrambled to his feet, his face wreathed in smiles. The slanted umbrella framed him in a gigantic aureole. "One more indiscretion," he said, "and this time the confessional is not the source, that is, not directly. My son, you had better marry her straight away."

By the time all he inferred had reached Gerry's brain Father Mathias had climbed his mule and was off to the house. Gerry followed him slowly. He did not feel as though he were about to pay a price. The marriage brought thus suddenly to his contemplation would be no meaningless or unlawful form to him. He would make it a solemn consecration to fatherhood.

When he reached the house, Margarita, standing panting and frightened beside the priest, one hand on her breast, the other held out as though groping, studied his face for a long moment and then hurled herself into his arms. He held her close and laughed. His laughter was low, strong like himself, reassuring. Margarita was quivering and sobbing. He had never heard her weep before. Suddenly she stopped and raised her eyes to his. His laughter ceased. Their looks intermingled and held. Each made to the other an unspoken promise.

The next morning the priest left them again. He held his weight almost jauntily on the ambling mule. His wide-brimmed, clerical hat was pushed back to the verge of a fall and the great umbrella was slanted to

meet the level rays of the rising sun. Priest and mule combined to give the impression of a sea-going tub rigged in rakish, joyous lines. The priest was jubilant. He had married the lovers and carried with him the documents for registry. Gerry walked beside the mule as far as the bridge. There the tub turned laboriously and its convoy with it. The two men looked over the valley and smiled. The valley smiled back. Already it was robed in a wide-spread flush of green. The priest nodded slowly. "It is good," he said. "Farewell, my son," and he turned to sail ponderously out into the barren lands of cactus and thorn.

Gerry watched him out of sight and then turned to his work of tilling the soil. He cut the best of the cane and Bonifacio planted the joints at a slant with knowing hand. He sorted the bolls of cotton. The women studied the fiber and when it was long, silky and tough they picked out the seeds with care and hoarded them, for their time was not yet. One duty urged another. The days passed rapidly.

One morning Gerry looked up from his labor to find a mounted figure just behind him. An elderly man of florid face sat a restive stallion of Arab strain. The stranger's note was opulence. From his Panama hat, thin and light as paper, to his silver spurs and the silver-mounted harness of his horse, wealth marked him. He was dressed in white linen and his flaring, glossy riding-boots of embroidered Russian leather stood out from the white clothes and the whiter sheep's fleece that served as saddle cloth, with telling effect. In his hands was a silver-mounted rawhide quirt. His face was

grave, his eyes blue and kindly. As Gerry looked at him he spoke, "I'm Lieber from up the river. Father Mathias told me about you."

Gerry started at the familiar English and frowned. At the frown the stranger's eyes shifted. "I did n't come down here to bother you," he went on hastily. "Father Mathias told me about the green grass and I could n't keep away. I've got cattle and horses up my way and they're dying — starving. I came down to make a deal. I've picked out a hundred and twenty head with blood in 'em — horses and cattle. If you'll take 'em and feed 'em through to the rains I'll give you ten out of the hundred. Some are too far gone to save, I'm afraid."

Gerry looked at his tiny plantations which showed up meanly in the great expanse of waste pasture. "I'm sorry," he said, "but I'm afraid I can't. You see, I can't afford to fence."

Lieber looked around and nodded. "That's all right," he said, "I've got a lot of old wire that's no use to me and a lot of loafers to tear it down and put it up. I'll fence as much pasture as you say and throw in the fencing on the deal."

"That's mighty fair," said Gerry; "I'll take you." He dropped his hoe. "Won't you come down to the house and have a bite to eat?" He turned and Lieber started to follow. "By the way," said Gerry over his shoulder, "you're not a German, are you?"

Lieber stopped his horse. His eyes wavered. "No," he said shortly, "I'm not. I'm an American. After all, I don't think I ought to waste any time. Hours

tell with starving stock. I'll just get back in a hurry, if you don't mind. My men and the wire will be here just that much sooner."

Gerry frowned again but this time at himself. He felt that he had stepped on another man's corns while defending his own. "All right, Mr. Lieber," he said. "The sooner the better. I'll do all I can to help."

The next morning the men came accompanied by ox-carts loaded with fencing, posts and all. Lieber was with them. He sat his horse through the hot hours and drove his men steadily. Gerry threw himself into the work as foreman. The fence grew with amazing rapidity. From the bridge they carried it in a straight line past the house to the river. It cut off a vast triangle whose two other sides were held by the ditch and the river. By night the work was almost done. Gerry was tired and happy, but he sighed. How many weeks of toil would not he and Bonifacio have had to put in to accomplish that fence! Money assumed a new aspect in his thoughts. What could he not do if he had money to buy material and to pay labor? How he could make a little money grow! He thought of the bank account at home that must be piling up in his name. But somehow the thought of that money was not tantalizing. That solution had nothing to do with his present problem of life. That money seemed unrelated to himself now — unrelated to effort. It did not belong in the scheme of things.

Lieber stayed the night with them and Gerry studied and imitated the older man's impersonality. Lieber kept his eyes on his plate or in the vague distance while

the women attended them and as soon as the business of eating was over he retired to the room that had been allotted to him.

He was up early in the morning and away to meet the coming herd. First came the horses, neighing and quickening their weak trot at the smell of grass. Far away and like a distorted echo sounded the lowing of the slower cattle. The little herd of Fazenda Flores caught the moaning cry and lifted lazy heads. One or two lowed back.

The horses were rounded up at the bridge to await the cattle. They stretched thin necks toward the calling grass and moved restlessly about with quick turns of eager heads and low impatient whinnies. Lieber sat his stable-fed stallion stolidly, but his eyes grew moist as he looked over the bony lot of horses. "They must wait for the cattle," he said to Gerry. "A fair start and no favor. God, if you could have seen them three months ago!"

The cattle came up in a rapid shamble that carried them slowly for they were staggering in short, quick steps. Their heads hung almost to the ground. They had no shame. They moaned pitifully — continually.

Gerry opened the wire gap. The horses gave an anticipatory whirl and then dashed through. They forgot their weakness. They galloped down the slope, spurning beneath their feet the food they had longed for. They did not stop till they reached the rich bottoms. Lieber smiled affectionately. "There's spirit for you," he said.

The cattle followed but the men had to beat the first

through away from the gap. They had stopped to eat and had blocked the way. At last they were all in and the gap closed. One or two stood with straddled feet and continued to low, their lips just brushing the lush grass. "Poor beasts," said Lieber, the smile gone from his face, "they are too weak to eat."

He and Gerry went back to the house for breakfast. The herders sat and smoked. They had had coffee; it would see them through half the day. Before Lieber left, the horses were herded once more and with much trouble driven out upon the desert. Lieber turned to Gerry. "Don't let them back in until to-morrow, please," he said. "If you do, they'll founder."

"What about the cattle?" asked Gerry.

"The cattle are all right. They have n't enough spirit left to kill themselves eating. They'll begin lying down pretty soon. Good-by, and remember, you'll get a warm welcome up at Lieber's whenever you feel like riding over."

"Thanks," said Gerry. "Good-by."

He watched Lieber ride away on the road the priest had taken. Fazenda Flores, his isolated refuge, was beginning to link itself to a world. Man, like a vine, has tendrils. To climb he must reach them out and cling.

CHAPTER XXI

THE horses picked up rapidly, the cattle more slowly. Two calves, added to the herd over night, aroused memories of the home farm in Gerry's breast. Every morning he stood by the pasture fence and gazed with a thrill on the new life in the scene. A fluttering corn husk or the wave of a hand was enough to start the horses careering over the fields. Life had sprung up in them anew. They played at being afraid. They leaped mere hummocks as though they were walls. Heads and tails held high, they breasted the morning breeze in a vigorous, resounding trot. Here and there heels were flung high. The trot echoed in a rapid crescendo that broke and was lost in a wild clatter of hoofs, beating out the music of a mad gallop. The cattle, all but a few that still hovered between life and death, now stood sturdily on four legs. They lifted their heads slowly and gazed mild-eyed at the romping horses.

Resurrection was becoming a familiar miracle to Gerry — a sort of staccato accompaniment to life. Like himself, like Fazenda Flores, all these had been plunged in young ruin. He began to see the line between ruin and death. Ruin is fruitful. It holds a seed. He could see it in Fazenda Flores, in the horses and cattle, and give it a name but he had not visualized it in himself. He had no time and no inclination now

for introspection. Without analysis he felt that he was at one with the world into which he had fallen. It held him as though to an allotted place.

The reward of those long months of preparation was at hand. Once every spade thrust had seemed but the precursor to barren effort. Now every stroke of the hoe seemed to bring forth a fresh green leaf. Life fell into an entrancing monotone. It became an endless chain that forged its own links and lengthened out into an endless perspective. Days passed. The arrival of Lieber's foreman to see how the stock was progressing was an event. He brought with him an old saddle and bridle — a gift from Lieber to Gerry. "He says," the foreman remarked with a leer, on making the presentation, "you can ride anything you can catch."

Gerry felt the foreman needed putting in place. He went into the house and reappeared carrying something in his hat. He climbed the fence and called. The horses raised their heads and looked. Some were lazy after watering but the others trotted over toward him. They stopped a few yards off and scrutinized him as though to divine his intentions. Then they approached cautiously, with tense legs, ready to whirl and bolt. A greedy colt refused to play the game of fear to a finish. He strode forward and was rewarded with a large lump of sugar. The sugar was coarse and black, first cousin to virgin molasses, but it was redolent. The horses crowded around Gerry. They pawed at him. He had to beat them back. They made a bold assault on the empty but odorous hat. Gerry laughed and cleared the fence to get away from them. "I think

your master must be mistaken," he said with a smile to the foreman. "Some of these colts can never have been backed."

The foreman looked his admiration. He began to take Gerry seriously; it was man to man now. He pointed out the horses that were broken to saddle and named their gaits and mettle. Then his shrewd eyes looked around for further details to add to his report to his master. He noted that a few, a very few, of the cattle were still lying down when they should have been on their feet and eating. These were herded into a corner of their own and old Bonifacio was tending them. Beside each was a pile of fresh cut grass. As they ate they nosed it away, but Bonifacio made the rounds and with his foot pushed back the fodder, keeping it in easy reach.

The foreman's eyes caught on the two new-born calves. They had been taken from their weak mothers and were in a rough pen by themselves. The foreman did not have to count the stock to see that none was missing. He was cattle bred. A gap in the herd or the bunch of horses would have flown at the seventh sense of the stockman the moment he laid eyes on the field. Instead there were these two calves. "Master," he said to Gerry, "you have made up your mind not to lose a head. You would save even these little ones, born before their time!"

Gerry nodded gravely. He had worked hard to save all. He winced at the mere thought of death at Fazenda Flores even down to these least weaklings. He himself had fed them patiently from a warm bottle. In

trouble and valuable time they had cost him an acre of cotton. But an acre of cotton was a small price to pay for life.

A grip of the hand and the foreman was off in a cloud of dust. At the bridge he pulled his horse down to the shambling fox trot that spares beast and man but eats steadily into a long journey. A bearer of good tidings rides slowly.

Gerry turned to his work but a cry from the house arrested him. He listened. The cry was followed by a moan. He dropped his field tools and ran to the house. All was commotion. The day of days had come to Margarita with the appalling suddenness of an event too long expected. She called for Gerry. He went to her. She looked a mere child in the big rough bed he had made with his own hands. Suffering had struck the light from her face. She was frightened and clung to him.

Joana, the old negress, and Dona Maria made methodical haste about the room. At the second cry from Margarita Gerry lost his head. These women were hard, they were iron. They paid no attention. "Something must be done. Something must be done," he said aloud in English. The aunt and the negress worked on in silent preparation of the preparations of many days. Margarita screamed. They paid no heed. Her frenzied grip bit into Gerry's hand. "We must have a doctor," he shouted in their own tongue to the women. "Do you hear? We must have a doctor!" Cold sweat was gathering on his brow. He too was frightened.

Dona Maria glanced at him. "A doctor?" she cried impatiently. "What for? The girl is not ill."

"Not ill! Not ill!" roared Gerry.

Dona Maria picked up two towels and tied them to the bed's head. She tore Margarita's hands from Gerry's; then she twisted the towels into ropes and gripped the girl's hands on them. "Hold on to those," she commanded. "Towels have some sense." Then she clawed Gerry out of his seat by the bed and hustled him out of the room — out of the house. The door slammed behind him. He heard the great bar drop. He was locked out.

Gerry paced angrily up and down the veranda. Calm came back to him. He saw that he had been a fool. He stopped and sat down on the steps of the veranda. Here, before he had made his benches, she had often sat beside him, caressed him, sung to him. How cold he had been. How little he had done for her and now she was doing this for him! He remembered that as she had worked on baby clothes she had said she wished she had some blue ribbon. They had all laughed at her, but she had nodded her girl's head gravely and said, "Yes, I wish I had some blue ribbon — a little roll of blue ribbon." What a brute he had been to laugh!

The cries ceased but the door did not open. Gerry still waited. He knew he was waiting and that the women in the house were waiting. It was terrible to wait — more terrible than the cries. Then she called to him, "Geree! Geree!" He leaped up and pounded on the door but nobody came. Yesterday they had all

been servile to him; to-day he was nothing. He shouted, "I am here! I shall always be here." She did not call again. He paced up and down the veranda saying to himself, "A little roll of blue ribbon — a little roll of blue ribbon!" He stumbled on the saddle that Lieber had sent him. It held his eye. He picked up the bridle and ran down to the pasture. He caught the oldest and gentlest of the horses, opened a gap in the fence and led him out. Then he called Bonifacio. "Listen," he said, "you must take the fattest of the steers — the red one with the blazed face — you must drive him into the town and sell him."

The darky demurred. "It is too late for market, master."

"It does not matter. You must do as I say," said Gerry angrily. "You must sell the steer. If you can not sell him you must give him for blue ribbon. Do you understand? You must bring back blue ribbon for your mistress. She says she must have a little roll of blue ribbon."

The darky acquiesced. Together they saddled the old horse and Bonifacio, armed with a long bamboo to prod the fat steer, mounted and cut out his charge from the herd. Gerry accompanied him to the bridge. "You understand, blue ribbon. A roll of blue ribbon," he shouted.

The old darky nodded gravely and repeated, "Yes, master, a roll of blue ribbon. The mistress wishes a roll of blue ribbon. I'll not forget."

The steer looked back from the desert to the green of the pasture and lowed. The darky prodded him

with his stick. The steer lowed again and then shambled off down the trail. Horse and rider followed slowly. Gerry watched them until they were a mere patch of dust in the distance; then he hurried back to the house and sat down to wait again.

Night came and with it horror. The ordeal was on in earnest now. Gerry stopped his ears with his fingers and sat doggedly on. Hours passed and Bonifacio returned. He laid a little package and some money beside his master. He unsaddled the old horse and turned him into the pasture; then he came back, sat down at Gerry's feet and slept. Gerry looked with wonder on his nodding head. He took his fingers from his ears. On the instant a high, unearthly shriek seemed to rend itself through flesh — through walls — and then tore on swift wings into the vast silence that stretched away into the night. The ear could trace — the eye could almost follow — the terrifying flight of this demon of sound as it hurtled out over the valley, over the still trees and the black water, until it crashed against the far banks of the river and died. Gerry dropped his face in his hands and sobbed. A low moaning was coming from the house and then a new, strange sound — a sound that struck straight at the heart — the first wail of the first born. The moaning caught on that cry, stumbled and recovered into a thin, weak laugh. Pain had passed and with the child was born laughter.

Gerry sat stunned. It seemed incredible. That shriek and then moaning and laughter in one weak breath! Was pain — such pain — so short lived? The echo of the terrible shriek still rang in his ears.

Then the door opened and Dona Maria came bustling out. "Come in," she cried; "thou art the father of a man child."

Gerry went in and knelt beside the bed. Margarita looked at him and smiled faintly, proudly. He laid the little roll of blue ribbon in her weak hand. She turned her head slowly and looked down. She saw the glint of blue and understood. She turned her eyes, swimming black pools in a white, drawn face, to Gerry. To sacrifice she added adoration.

CHAPTER XXII

THE calm which had settled on Alix's life puzzled her. She wondered if she was beginning to miss Gerry less. And then she remembered that she could never have really missed him because she had never really known him. Collingeford had brought a fresh note into existence. She felt that at the end of his week on the Hill he had fled from her — fled from falling in love with her. She knew that he would come back. How should she meet him?

She was still debating the point when Collingeford arrived in the city. Upon arrival he called on Mrs. J. Y. and then on Nance and then, of course, on Alix. As she came into the room he felt a strange fluttering in his throat. It stopped his words of greeting. He stuttered and stared. He had never felt so glad at the sight of any one.

"What *are* you looking so dismayed about?" cried Alix with a smile and holding out her hand. "Has a short year changed me so much? Am I so thin or so fat?"

Collingeford recovered himself. "Neither too thin nor too fat. It is perfection, not imperfection, that dismays a man. You call it a short year?" he added gravely. "It's been an eternity — not a year!"

But Alix was not to be diverted from her tone of

badinage. She looked him over critically. "Well," she said, "I congratulate you. I did n't know before that bronze could bronze. What a lot of health you carry about with you."

Collingeford smiled. "Clem said I looked as though I had been living on babies."

"Clem!" said Alix. "Well, I never knew that young lady to stoop to flattery before. Anyway, she's wrong. You're not pink enough."

"Pink!" snorted Collingeford. "I should hope not."

They sat and stared at each other. Each found the other good to look upon. Seen alone, Collingeford's tall, tense figure or the fragile quality of Alix's pale beauty, would have seemed hard to match. Seen together, they were wonderfully in tone. Alix grew grave under inspection, Collingeford nervous. "There is no news?" he asked.

"None," said Alix and a far-away look came into her eyes as if her mind were off, thousands of miles, intent on a search of its own.

Collingeford broke the spell. He jumped up and said he had come for just one thing — to take her out for a walk. It was one of those nippy early winter afternoons cut out to fit a walk. Alix must put on her things. She did and together they walked the long length of the Avenue and out into the park.

By that time they had decided it was quite a warm afternoon after all — almost warm enough to sit down. They tried it. Collingeford sat half turned on the bench and devoured Alix with his eyes.

A full-blooded, clean young man in the presence of beauty is not a reasonable being. Collingeford was trying to be reasonable and was failing utterly in spite of the fact that he did not say a word. And just as he was going to say a word Alix gave him a full, measuring look and said, almost hastily, "It is too cold, after all. Quite chilly. It was our walking so fast deceived us." She rose and started tentatively toward the gate. "Come on, Honorable Percy," she said playfully.

Collingeford caught up with her and said moodily, "If you call me Honorable Percy again I shall dub you Honest Alix."

They were walking down the Avenue. "Honest Alix is n't half bad," he continued thoughtfully. "The race has got into the habit of yoking the word honest to our attitude toward other people's pennies but it's a good old word that stands for trustworthy, sincere, truthful and all the other adjectives that fit straight riding."

"Speaking of riding, Mr. Collingeford, you're riding for a fall." Alix glanced at him meaningly.

"How did you know?" he stammered and then went on rather sullenly, "Anyway, you're wrong. I'm not. But I was just going to." He prodded viciously at the cracks in the pavement with his stick.

"Don't," said Alix. "Don't do that, I mean. You'll break your stick and it's the one I like."

Collingeford turned a flushed face to her. "Look here, Alix," he said, "you *are* honest and sincere and all those things I said. Don't let's hedge — not just now. If your bad luck does n't let up — if you learn anything — anything you *don't want to know* — I can't say it

right out — would you — d'you think you ever would —”

Alix did not smile. He was too much in earnest and she liked him too much — was too much at one with him — not to feel what he was going through. “I like your Honest Alix,” she said, after a pause, “and I’m going to let her do the talking for a moment. If I learned absolutely that — that Gerry can never come back to me, there is no man that I would turn to quicker than to you.” Collingeford gave her a grateful look and the flush under his tan deepened. “Don’t misunderstand me,” she went on. “I like you a whole lot, but I have never thought of marrying any one but Gerry. I’d like to marry Gerry. I’ve never married him yet. Not really.”

They walked on for some time in silence. Collingeford’s thoughts had raced away southwards and Alix’s followed them unerringly. “Don’t make one horrible mistake, Percy,” she said when she was sure. “Don’t imagine that I could ever love the bearer of ill tidings.”

Collingeford flushed, this time with shame. “No, of course not,” he stammered.

“You see,— or can’t you see?” she went on, “that all this new life of mine I’ve hung on to a single hook of faith. If the hook breaks — and sometimes it seems as if it must be wearing pretty thin — this new me must tumble. I have spun about myself a silky darkness and I have waited to break into light for Gerry. I could not break out from this probation for any other man. I do not mean that a woman can love but once — not necessarily. But I do think that one’s life must

spring from a new chrysalis to meet a new love fairly. Second loves at first sight have a tang of the bargain counter and the ready made. Love is not a chance tenant. He must build or grow into a new home."

They walked on in a full silence. Collingeford's shoulders drooped. For the first time in his life he felt old. "You are right — you are always right," he said at last. "I shall go away — somewhere where it's easy to sweat."

"Somewhere where it's easy to sweat!" exclaimed Alix. "What an ugly thought."

"It's only Bodsky," said Collingeford reminiscently. "Bodsky says you can drown any woman's memory in sweat. Good old Bod! I wonder where I shall find him."

"Oh," said Alix, "if it's Bodsky's, one must n't quarrel with it simply because it is ugly. But —"

"But what?" said Collingeford.

"I was going to say, 'But what naked language!' Perhaps it is one of those truths one shrinks from because it starts in by slapping one's face. Anyway, even if it is a truth, it's horrid. It hurts a woman to be forgotten."

Collingeford smiled. "Just so," he said and stopped before an up-town ticket agency. "Do you mind?" he asked, with a wave of his hand. They went in and he bought a passage for England. He was to sail the following afternoon. He looked so glum over it that Alix consented to lunch with him and see him off.

He came for her the next day a little late but, when she saw his face, she felt a shock and forgot to chide

him. Her eyes mirrored the trouble in his but somehow she felt that it was not the parting from her that had turned him pale in a night. He helped her into the waiting cab and then sank back into his corner.

Alix laid her gloved hand on his knee. "What is it?" she asked.

Collingeford's face twitched. He fixed his eyes through the cab window on nothing. "Bodsky," he said, "is dead. He has been dead for months."

"Oh," cried Alix, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry for you." She did not try to say any more. She had put all her heart into those few words.

Collingeford drew out his pocket-book and took from it a soiled sheet of paper — a leaf torn from a field note-book. He held it out to her with trembling hand. "I wouldn't show it to any one else. Trouble has made you great-hearted. When you said you were sorry you felt it so that the words just choked out. I need to tell you all about it. I must talk — talk a whole lot. Sometimes a man must talk or blubber. Read it."

Alix puzzled over the slip of paper. "What's the name of the place? I can't make it out."

"It's a little hole on the borders of Thibet. That paper's been handed along for five months. The envelope it came in was in tatters."

"Dear Old Pal," read Alix, "Do you remember what I used to tell you? When a man has seen all the world he must go home or die. When we last parted I had three places left to see, but they have n't lasted me as long as I thought they would. I have sent you my

battery. The bores are a bit too big for the new powder and you can't use the guns, I know, but you 'll have a home, old man, and you can give them a place in a rack. They will make a little room as wide as the ends of the earth. I did n't kill her. I made her kill herself. Bodsky."

Alix was puzzled again but then she remembered. "So he did n't kill her, after all," she said.

"Kill her! Kill what?" said Collingeford. "Oh, yes. I remember. As if *that* mattered."

"It matters. It *does* matter," cried Alix, outraged.

"Forgive me," said Collingeford. "I had forgotten that you never knew Bodsky. You said yesterday that Bodsky used naked language. You were right. Bodsky undressed things. Just as some people see red and some blue, Bodsky saw things naked. He could look through a black robe of rumor spangled with lies and see truth naked. He was naked himself — naked and unashamed. It's hard for me to make you see because you did not know him. Bodsky was one of those men who could have accomplished anything — only he did n't. He sifted life through a big mesh. All the non-essentials — the trivialities — fell through. An act with Bodsky was a volition, measured, weighed, and then hurled. That's why if you knew him you knew that in his hands a crime was not a crime. That's why I know that he is dead. He never used a stale cartridge — his gun never missed fire."

Alix mused. "I can't see him — I can't quite see him. A man who can accomplish anything and does n't seems wrong — a waste."

"You can't see," said Collingeford, "because you are facing my point of view. You must turn around. Bodsky used to say that all humanity had a soul, but it took a tragedy to make a man. His tragedy was that life cut him out from the herd. He was n't a creator, he was a creation. Generations, races, eons, created Bodsky and left him standing like a scarred crag. He had but one mission — to see and understand. Have you ever sat in the desert on a moonlit night and looked at the Sphinx? It holds you — it holds your eyes in a vice. You wonder why. I'll tell you. It *knows*. That's the way it was with Bodsky. He only towered — knew — understood. If that is nothing, Bodsky was nothing."

They were silent. Presently Collingeford helped her out and together they passed through the rich foyer, the latticed palm room, and up the steps into the latest cry in dining-rooms. A little table in the far corner had been reserved for them. As they crossed the crowded room a hush fell over the tables. Some looked and were silent because Alix was beautiful and daintily gowned and Collingeford all that a man should be, but those who knew looked because Alix was Alix and Collingeford was Collingeford. These soon fell to whispering, predicting a match. Alix bowed abstractedly here and there as she followed the head waiter to her seat.

They sat down, each half facing the room. Alix caught her breath. "Whiffing the old air?" asked Collingeford.

"No," answered Alix. "Only sighing. I feel so out of it and that always makes one sigh whether one

wants to be in it or not. I know it all so well that this amounts to a disillusion. Time and absence have turned into a binocular and I'm looking through the wrong end. I see things clear but tiny. There's little Mrs. Deathe, pronounced Deet, and she is n't a day older. But now I see that she was born as old as she'll ever be."

"Good," said Collingeford.

"And with her is Mrs. Remmer. She's gone in for the little diamond veil brooches. They ruin the effect of a simply stunning hat but, as always, she has rushed at the newest, expensive fad. I did n't know why before, but somehow I can tell you now. She is the shopping instinct incorporated. To spend money is her only sensation. The lines of worry are in her face because she has bought all and still craves to spend."

Alix paused. "Go on," said Collingeford.

"There are only a few men in the room, but almost all of these women have husbands. The husbands are in two tenses — past and future. There must be a present but it is nebulous. I did n't know before but I know now that in time these women will go back or forward to their husbands. Some day they will get dizzy and fall and the shock will wake them up. I used to be patronizing to divorce, like all these, but divorce has taken on a new face all of a sudden. I see that it is a great antidote to its own evil. While we laugh and play with it, it is herding us on to a sane adjustment. We are tearing down the fence of the pasture and rushing out to scatter over fields that are free — and barren. By and by we'll come back tired and hungry and thirsty

and we'll see that the pasture's the thing — green and fresh and sustaining — and the fence, nothing."

"You see, you understand, you are prophetic," said Collingeford, smiling.

"But I do not tower like your Bodsky," said Alix and then bit her tongue at the slip.

A shadow seemed to fall on them. The room's high, delicate paneling and the painted oval of the ceiling seemed to hover over a suddenly darkened emptiness. The hum and chatter of the throng became little and far away. Collingeford and Alix felt as though they sat alone and yet not alone. Collingeford nodded as though Alix had spoken. "Yes," he said, "Bodsky has come back to us. Don't regret it. I don't know how it is with you but I feel that we two are alone with him and that it's worth while. He's come on us like a cloud.

"But I like clouds," he continued, "big black clouds. If it were not for them you could n't see the lightning or hear the thunder. They make lightning and thunder — the arm and the voice of the gods. Bodsky was n't divine; he could n't create and he knew it and felt it. But he could echo the roar and reflect the light. I remember a duffer making a careless remark about a woman's travail. Bodsky looked him over and said, 'Some day you will see and hear and know and the memory of that remark will bring you on to your knees. But this much I can tell you now, young man. I would rather have been the man who produced the first wooden spoon than Alexander the Great. From a spoon to a baby is a long step up. That's why we have made a

shrine for mothers. Generally speaking, women are despicable. But a mother has passed through crucifixion to transfiguration.' I think it was about the longest speech he ever made. To him that was one of the things too big to drop through the mesh of his sieve of life unnoticed.

"Bodsky was elemental. He was *an element*. He could not produce but he could make fertile the lives of lesser men. I was the duffer that made the careless remark. That was the first time he ever spoke to me. I've sat at his feet ever since. I did n't know I was doing it but I can see it now. And the result is this: Bodsky could n't go home. But I can and I'm going home before I've seen the whole world. Only — only I wish I could take you with me."

"There, there," said Alix, playfully, but her eyes were soft. "We must go now or you will miss your ship."

CHAPTER XXIII

AS Alix and Collingeford left the dining-room she said, "They weren't all butterflies after all. I saw a man and a woman."

"Not really!" said Collingeford. "Who?"

"Alan Wayne and Dora Tennel."

At Alan's name Collingeford's face lit up with interest. "Ten Percent Wayne, eh? Yes, you're right. He's a man. And Dora Tennel, ex-Lady Braeme: Yes, she's a woman too,—in a way."

"Has she a tarnished reputation?"

Collingeford stopped short in his stride and looked keenly at Alix. "My dear lady," he said, "that is a question one does not put to a man. However, it does n't embarrass me to answer it in this case. She has not. What on earth put it into your head?"

"I don't know," said Alix. "Oh, yes I do. I remember. Some one told me once that Alan surrounded himself with tarnished reputations."

Each followed the train of his own thoughts until they reached the pier. Alix did not get out of the cab. She leaned from the window and said good-by. Collingeford held her hand and her eyes long, then he turned away and hurried into the elevator.

When Alix got home she sat down and wrote a note to Alan — just a line to tell him that she was ready and wished to see him. He came the following after-

noon. At first he was a little awkward, straining just the least too much not to betray his nervousness. But the sight of Alix put him at his ease. Once it had been with a fine art that she had pampered the ill-at-ease into well-being but as Alan crossed the room and stood before her he knew that art had been banished and that a new Alix, simple and secure in the unassailable atmosphere that guards true women, held out her hand to him from beyond an invisible barrier. She had become a true woman — true in the sense of honor — and she was tempered as steel, but soft with the softness of motherhood. About her there was the peace of an inner shrine. She drew him into it unhesitatingly and he suddenly felt unclean just as he had felt unworthy on that other day when he had recoiled from Nance's loving arms around his neck.

"You're not looking very well, Alan," said Alix when he was seated.

"No, I'm not on the top of the wave just now," replied Alan. "Touch of river fever. It's like memory — a hard thing to shake."

"I'm not trying to shake mine," said Alix calmly. "My memories have made me."

"No wonder you don't quarrel with them," said Alan in frank admiration.

"Life," said Alix, "is beginning to pay dividends — not much, just a competence. Enough to live on." She smiled faintly.

"It is well," said Alan, "to be satisfied with sanity if you can only keep sane. You could and did. You decided to stick to the legitimate and you have your

steady and lasting reward. The other — pays in a lump. It's easy to lose a whole nugget."

"Alan, when are you going to come back to the legitimate? Don't you ever tire of life as a variety show? Would n't you rather have one real steady star in life than a whole lot of tarnished tinsel ones?"

Alan jumped to his feet, stuck his hands in his coat pockets and started walking up and down the somber room. They were in the library. "A steady star," he repeated. "What a find that would be! I've raised many a star on my horizon, Alix, but the longer I look at 'em the more they twinkle back. It's easier to down conscience than to down blood."

"In the end," said Alix, "a man must down blood or it downs him — downs him irretrievably. Blood unchecked is just common beast."

"Do you think I don't know it?" flashed Alan. "Each day I find an old haunt denied to me. I am ill at ease. My world has left yours behind. There is a pale. Behind it lies Red Hill. Do you know I have n't been to the Hill for three years? Behind it lies Nance, the faithfullest, most trusting foster-sister a waster ever had. And now you. You lie behind it and toy with my soul through the bars."

Alix sprang to her feet and laid strong, nervous hands on Alan's shoulders. She shook him and turned him so that he faced the light. Alan did not laugh. There was fire in Alix's eyes. "You little thing," she said tensely, "not to see that the bars are down."

He turned under her hands and she let him go. He stood looking out of the window at the bare trees. Alix

watched him. "Alan, you can come to the Hill to-night. They — we — are all going to be together here. It's Clem's birthday. If you can feel the pale, that's enough for me. I want you to be with us."

"Alix, believe me or not, it's because I feel the pale that I won't come. If there's a ship sailing for the ends of the earth before night it shall carry me. This big city is n't big enough to hold all the Hill and leave me room to wander outside."

"Then why — why —"

"I'll tell you. The last time I saw J. Y., he said to me among other things, 'Yesterday Clem was crying because you had not come to the house. I try to think, Alan, that it is because Clem is there that you have not come.' Those were his very words. The rest passed but that stuck. It stuck because it was the truth and I had been blind to it. What did you say a little while ago? Blood unchecked is just common beast. Well, there it is in a nutshell. I bear the mark of the beast. Do you think I want Clem to see it?"

Alan's hands were locked behind him. He turned from the window. "Alix, I can't see Clem yet. She is expecting me. I told her that the better half of me would look her up as soon as I got back. But what if somebody that does n't know my better half at all should see me riding — walking with Clem? I can't risk *that*. Do you understand?"

"But oh, Alan," said Alix. "If you could only see Clem now. She's glorious. Why it's three years,— three years since you saw her. You used to think me beautiful —"

"Used!" protested Alan, casting a valuing glance at Alix's pale beauty.

"Well," conceded Alix, "you think me beautiful. Beside Clem with her heaps of brown hair and deep blue eyes, I am nothing. I am worse — I am a doll. And she was born with a strange wisdom and strength of her own. The world has never reached her — will never reach her. She's made her own world and she's made it right. And yet — the wisdom in her deep eyes, Alan. She knows — she knows it all — and you know that she knows, only, faith sits enthroned."

"Faith sits enthroned," repeated Alan; "that's why I can't come to-night." He looked around for his hat and stick.

"By the way," said Alix, "why J. Y. and why Mrs. J. Y.? I've always wondered."

"I don't know," said Alan. "I've always wondered too, I suppose. But here's the Judge. He can tell you."

"Tell what?" asked the Judge as he walked in and took Alix' outstretched hand.

"Why there's no Mr. Wayne and Mrs. Wayne — only J. Y.'s."

"And you don't know, Alan?" asked the Judge. "Well, I'll tell you. Mr. Wayne and Mrs. Wayne — they were Alan's father and his young wife. Their life was a hot flame that suddenly smothered itself in the clouds of its own smoke. The memory of the clouds passed with them but the flame — the flame burns on in the hearts of all who knew them. It will burn on.

That's why J. Y. is J. Y. and that's why it will always be J. Y. and Mrs. J. Y. to the Hill."

Alan said good-by in a hurried low voice and started for the door but the Judge called to him: "Just a moment, Alan, I'm coming with you." Then he turned to Alix. "I just dropped in to tell you I am delighted to be able to come to-night."

"I am glad," said Alix. "Perhaps you could persuade Alan to come too if you think —"

"If I think what?" The Judge eyed her steadily.

"If you think he is ready," finished Alix.

The Judge found Alan waiting for him on the steps as he hurried out. "What are you doing for the rest of the afternoon?" he asked.

"I'm sailing for South America if there's a connection."

The Judge looked up surprised. "I did n't know you had anything urgent on." They walked on in silence for some minutes, then the Judge said, hesitatingly, "Alan, you're rushed, of course, but if you could — if you can — do one thing and put it down to my account. Just drop in and see J. Y. for a minute. Somehow I feel that you can't see J. Y. the way he really is, — the way I can. That's natural, too, I suppose. But if you knew him, Alan, the way I do, you'd know it's an honor for any man to shake hands with J. Y. Wayne. And to have J. Y. Wayne want to shake hands with you is a thing that comes to most men as a reward.

"Have you ever figured it out that there's only one man in a million that knows when to refuse to shake

hands and has the courage to back his judgment? You hear flippant people saying every day that they would n't shake hands with such a one but when it comes to the showdown their arms suddenly limber. J. Y. is one in a million. He has a rare thing — an untainted hand. There is a tale on 'Change to the effect that a firm was saved from a smash because J. Y. walked up to its head and shook hands with him on the floor."

"I don't know," said Alan, "that J. Y. wants to shake hands with me." He spoke almost questioningly. "You know, Judge, there have been days when he would n't."

"I don't know that he wants to, either, my boy. But I do know this. He's a busy man, but there's never a day that he's too rushed to think of you."

Alan stopped and held out his hand. "I am much obliged to you," he said. "I'm sorry I didn't think of it myself. I'm off to his office now, as soon as I've telephoned Swithson."

A few minutes later found Alan explaining to a new office boy that he wished to speak to the head of the firm. The boy judged himself in possession of a green one and grinned. "Certainly," he said. "You wish to speak to Mr. Wayne. Are you in a hurry?"

Alan was offering to start the boy with his foot when the head clerk, passing through the hall, caught sight of him and hurried up. "Mr. Wayne is just going, sir. Shall I stop him?"

"Please," said Alan and followed the clerk. The office boy fell to stamping letters with unwonted diligence.

J. Y. received his nephew with outstretched hand.

His rugged face was lit up with the rare smile that came to it seldom, for it was the far-flung ripple — the visible expression of a deep commotion.

"I just dropped in, sir," said Alan, "to say good-by. I'm off again to South America. Africa seems to be taking a year off."

"When are you leaving?" asked J. Y.

"This evening," said Alan. "The boat's already pulled out but I'll catch her at Quarantine. She's waiting for her papers."

They sat and looked at each other for a moment and then J. Y. arose and held out his hand again. "If that's the case," he said, "I won't keep you. Good-by and good luck."

"Good-by, sir," said Alan.

As he reached the door J. Y. spoke again. "Alan," he said, "I'm glad you dropped in."

"I am too, sir," said Alan. As he went out he forgot to deliver a word he had prepared for the office boy. J. Y. had said he was glad he had dropped in. There was nothing in the words to brood over, but J. Y. could make a simple phrase say a world of things and Alan was thoughtful — almost depressed — as he hurried off.

He was just leaving the sedate old office building, sandwiched in between modern towers of Babel, when a cab drew up at the curb. The door opened and a girl stepped out. She suddenly stood still. Alan's eyes were drawn to her and found hers fixed on him. He drew a quivering breath. "But, oh! Alan, if you could only see Clem now!" Alix had said and had tried to tell him of the beauty of Clem. Now Clem stood be-

fore him. How weak were words! How futile to try to convey the essence of Clem's beauty in words! He stepped towards her hesitatingly. She saw his hesitation and a cloud came over the light in her face. Her moist lips trembled. Their hands met.

"Alan!" she said and he answered, "Clem!"

And so they stood, his eyes fixed in hers that were blue and deep. He felt his soul sinking, sinking into those cooling pools. He did not wish ever to speak again — ever to think again.

And then Clem laughed. Her eyes wrinkled up. There was a gleam of even teeth. The wind blew her furs about her and lit the color in her cheeks. "How solemn we are after three years!" she cried. "Three years, Alan. Are n't you ashamed?"

Alan felt a sense of sudden insulation as though she had deliberately cut the current that had flowed so strongly between them. He rebelled for once against flippancy. Unknowingly he tried to bring his — and Bodsky's — world of naked things into the city. He failed to answer to Clem's mood because he would not believe in it. "I am going away," he stammered weakly and waved at an approaching four-wheeler, piled high with traveling kit and convoyed by his hurried but never flurried servant.

But Clem stuck to her guns. "Really?" she said with a glance at the loaded cab and with arching eyebrows. Then her smile burst again. "You can't expect me to be surprised, can you? We seem to have a habit of meeting when you are on the point of going

away. There. You must be in a hurry. Good-by," and she held out a gloved hand.

Alan's spirit was ever ready for war and this, he suddenly perceived, was war. He braced himself and smiled too. "Twice hardly amounts to a habit," he drawled. He had never drawled to Clem before but then Clem had never before taken up the social rapier with him. "Besides," he went on, "there's a difference. Last time you ran after me."

Clem's smile trembled, steadied itself and then fought bravely back. "Yes," she said, "yes." And then her eyes wavered and wandered. She dropped his hand. "Good-by," she said again, the faintest catch in her voice, and hurried away to seek J. Y.

Alan stood and watched her. What shoulders she had and what a swing to them. Slim of hip and foot and ankle — it was the body of a boy — a boy god. A body, a life, a soul of promise, of treasures garnered and enshrined. Alan cast his mind back over his own life. He felt a sinking within him. "For a mess of pottage," he muttered and then his servant touched his arm anxiously and held out his watch, face up. "You'll never make it, Mr. Wayne."

Alan turned on him but not angrily. "Perhaps not, Swithson, and perhaps yes. You may go back to the flat. I'll get along all right." And with that he hurled himself at the cab. "Double fare if you make the Battery in ten minutes," he shouted to the driver and then settled back in the seat to ponder.

CHAPTER XXIV

AT last the rains came to the valley and Fazenda Flores. Gerry spent long hours beside his sluiceway watching for a rise in the river, but it did not come. The torrent of rain was local and he remembered that Lieber had told him that the floods—the great floods—came from hundreds of miles up the river and generally under a brazen sky. Night, black night, had fallen with the rain and he was just turning to seek shelter from the unbroken downpour when a voice raised in song reached his ears. He waited. The voice drew nearer. In a nasal tone, which somehow sounded familiar though it was unknown to him, it was chanting a long string of doggerel ending in an unvarying refrain. Finally Gerry could make out the long-drawn tail-end of the song: “—comin’ down the drawr.”

English! American! Cowboy music! The impressions came in rapid succession. Gerry strove to pierce the darkness. He could hear the near-by splash of careful mules, picking their way through puddles with finicking little steps. He felt a shadow in the darkness and could just see above it a blur of yellow. Behind it, more shadows. On an impulse he did not stop to measure, he shouted in English, “Hallo, there!”

The doggerel was choked off in mid-flight. The yel-

low blur came to a sudden stop and the nasal voice rang out in quick staccato, "Speak again, stranger, and speak quick!"

"It's all right," Gerry laughed back. "Where are you bound for?"

"I'm headed down the drawr lookin' for a chalk line where I c'n dry my feet. What do you know?"

"Can you see the water in the ditch at your right?"

"Yasser, I can. I c'n see you, too."

"Well," shouted back Gerry, "your eyes beat mine. Follow the ditch until you come to a bridge. I'll meet you there."

Gerry found the little cavalcade waiting for him, six pack-mules, a native driver and, towering above them, a great lanky figure in a yellow oil-skin slicker topped by a broad-brimmed Stetson. Gerry looked over the outfit as carefully as the darkness would allow and then said tentatively, "There's a house down there in the valley."

"Is the'?" drawled the stranger spitting deliberately into the ditch. "Well," he volunteered after a further pause, "my name's Jake Kemp. The rest of this outfit is six mules packin' orchids and the greaser packin' the mules."

"That's all right," said Gerry, "I guess we can put you up."

He led the way and the pack-train splashed along after him. The mules were soon relieved of their burdens and turned into the pasture. Bonifacio took the native muleteer away to his quarters and Gerry and the stranger passed through the house to the kitchen.

A patriarchal hospitality came naturally to the inmates of Fazenda Flores. It was a tradition not only on that plantation but throughout a vast hinterland, where life was rude and death sudden, to be gentle to the stranger, to feed him and his beast and to speed him on in the early morning. There was but one rule to the stranger: He must keep his eyes to the front. Jake Kemp had evidently learned the brief code. He ate ravenously, poured down coffee with the recklessness of a man that draws on a limitless power to sleep, and made his few remarks to Gerry and to Gerry alone.

Gerry was feeling a strange elation that he strove in vain to account for. This was an American but beyond that they had nothing in common. New York and Texas are connected only by fiction. Perhaps it was just curiosity. Curiosity invaded him. What was a Texas cowboy doing on the road past Fazenda Flores with a mule-train of orchids? As an opener he declared himself. "My name's Gerry Lansing," he said. "I've settled down here."

"So?" said Kemp, as he drew from his vest pockets the makings of a cigarette. Gerry had seen the yellow papers and the little bags of flaked tobacco. They struck convincingly the note of the West. Kemp himself was gotten up in the same key. Stetson hat, shirt sleeves, unbuttoned vest, collarless shirt, high-heeled boots and the yellow slicker tossed on the floor, all were in strict keeping with type. "Reckon you're f'm the States," drawled Kemp as he accomplished the cigarette.

"Yes," said Gerry and added, with an idea to establishing a link, "like you."

"Naw," said Kemp, "I ain't f'm the States."

Gerry looked incredulous. "Are n't you an American?"

"Sure am," replied Kemp, unperturbed. "But I'm f'm Texas — leastways I *was* f'm Texas. Our folks wagoned over to New Mexico when I was a yearling."

Gerry had been West more than once. He slowly recollected that Easterners came into Texas and the Territories "from the States" and were considered but once removed from foreigners.

"Reckon you're f'm Noo Yawk," was Kemp's next deliberate contribution to the conversation.

"You're right," said Gerry. "How did you guess it?"

"I b'en thar," said Kemp.

With that, talk lagged. Gerry instinctively avoided the question direct and Kemp vouchsafed nothing more. Not till Gerry came upon him hitching up his loads early next morning did he speak again and then he said with a glint in his eye that was almost a smile, "I guess them's the first orchids that ever traveled to ma'ket under a diamond hitch."

Here was an opening but it came too late. Gerry did not try to follow it up. Once more in the saddle Kemp seemed to acquire a sudden new ease of body and mind. He hung by one knee and a stirrup and leaned over toward Gerry. "Stranger," he said, "I'm much obliged to ye. It's a long way f'm the Alamo to Noo Yawk, but the hull country's under one fence."

He waved his hand and was gone after his pack-train, lifting his mule with his goose-necked spurs into a protesting canter. Gerry followed him with his eyes. He felt a sense of loss and failure. Kemp had been like a breath of air laden with some long-forgotten scent that defies memory to give it a name.

For days Gerry's mind kept going back to his lodger for a night. This stranger had broken the quiet flow of life. He had gone, but the commotion he had caused lingered on. Two weeks after his passing, as evening was settling on Fazenda Flores, the echo of a mule's mincing steps on the bridge made Gerry look up from his work. Kemp was riding towards him. It was as though he came in answer to Gerry's constant thoughts. Gerry hurried forward to meet him.

"Howdy," said Kemp and paused on that to measure his welcome. He was satisfied and urged his tired mule on towards the house. Gerry walked beside him and learned that the shipment of orchids had just caught the steamer at the coast. Kemp unsaddled his mule and tossed the harness and slicker upon the veranda. Gerry opened the gap into the pasture and the mule nosed its cautious way through to water and the grass. As Gerry was closing the gap Kemp came up and stood beside him. He cast a knowing eye over the fat stock. "You done a good job for Lieber," he remarked.

Gerry nodded a little sadly. "Yes," he said, "the contract's filled. Lieber's sending for the stock day after to-morrow."

As they sat on the veranda that night smoking end-

less cigarettes, Kemp turned to his host. "D'ye mind if I stay over a day with you? Truth is, I want to he'p drive that stock up to Lieber's. I want to he'p whistle a bunch o' steers along once more and smell the dust an' the leakin' udders, an' I should n't wonder if I let out a yell or so, corralin' 'em at the other end."

Gerry nodded understandingly. "Why did you leave it?" he ventured and then regretted and murmured, "Never mind."

But Kemp was not offended. "Naw," he said, "I hain't killed my man—not lately—nor anything like that. I left it," he went on reminiscently, "because I could n't he'p it. I got to dreamin' nights of pu'ple cities."

"Purple what?" exclaimed Gerry.

Kemp took a cigarette from his mouth and almost smiled. "Never *did* hear of The Pu'ple City, I reckon?"

Gerry shook his head. Kemp drew a well-worn wallet from the capacious inner pocket of his vest and took out a ragged clipping. One could read in the glaring moonlight and Gerry glanced through the printed lines. Then he read them through again.

THE PURPLE CITY.

As I sat munching mangoes,
On the purple city's walls,
I heard the catfish calling,
To the crawfish in the crawls.
I saw the paper sunbeams,
Sprouting from the painted sun;
I saw the sun was sullen,
For the day had but begun.

Of dusty desert sky-road,
Ten thousand miles and more,
Stretched out before the morning,
And the sun sat in the door.
He sweated seas of sunshine,
As he started up the sky,
And he drowned the purple city,
In a tear-drop from his eye.

No more shall purple pansies
Look up at purple pinks,
Nor purple roses rival,
The cheeks of purple minx.
Alas! for purple city,
And its purple-peopled halls!
Alas! for me and mangoes,
On the purple city's walls!

Gerry looked upon his guest with new wonder as he handed back the clipping. Kemp put it away carefully, rolled a fresh cigarette, and blew a thick puff of smoke out into the moonlight. "Can't say it's po'try and I can't say it ain't. All I know is it roped *me*. I know that writer feller never munched no mangoes, 'cause mangoes don't munch. I know he never sat on no wall an' heerd catfish callin' cause catfish don't call. But he *seen* it all, stranger, jest the way he writ it down an' I b'en dreamin' pu'ple cities ever sence I read his screed."

"Did you start right out to look for them?" asked Gerry gravely.

"Naw," said Kemp, "I did n't have nothin' to go on. But one day a drummer feller thet I was stagin' across the White Mountains give me a plant magazine, and it had an article on commercial orchids with pic-

tures in colors. They was mostly kinder pu'plish an' I reckon it was that what got me started. It was the foreman pointin' out my mount to me an' I did n't lose no time. I drapped my rope on him an' I've been ridin' him ever sence."

"Found any purple cities?"

"Not rightly. I seen 'em — more'n once. But I guess pu'ple cities is always yon side the mountain. You can't jest ride up an' put your brand on 'em. They 're born mavericks and they die mavericks. An' I say, good luck to 'em." Kemp rose, tossed away his cigarette end and stood leaning with crooked elbow and knee against a veranda pillar. His keen aquiline features and deep-set eyes were lit up by the moonlight and seemed scarcely to belong to his great, loose-jointed frame. He was loose-jointed but like a flail — strong and tough. "There's one thing about the pu'ple cities," he added, "the daylight always beats you to 'em jest like in the po'm." He turned and went off to bed.

Gerry sat on in the moonlight seized by a strange sadness — the sadness the spirit feels under the troubled hovering of the unattainable and the mirage. Life had queer turns. Why should a cowboy start out to look for purple cities? It was grotesque on the face of it but, beneath the face of it, it was not grotesque.

Margarita stole out to seat herself beside him. She slipped her hand into his. She was worried. She was always worried when Gerry's thoughts were far away. "The Man," she said, for thus she had christened her baby boy from the day of his birth, "the Man sleeps.

He cried for thee and thou didst not come. So he slept, for he is a man."

Gerry's thoughts came back to his little kingdom. He sighed and then he smiled a smile of content. "It is late then, my flower?" He put his arm around her. "Let us go to bed, for to-morrow there is work."

"To-morrow there is always work," said Margarita. "I am not afraid of work, Gereë. The end of work never comes. It is the things that end that make me afraid." She, too, had felt the fluttering wings of the unattainable. Unknowingly she stood beneath the shadow of the stranger's purple city's walls.

The next day Kemp tried honestly to help Gerry with the tilling of the soil but the effort was still-born. Kemp had almost forgotten how to walk and his high-heeled boots fell foul of every hummock. "Look'y here, Mr. Lansing," he said after half an hour's toil, "ain't there no colts—bad uns—you want backed nor calves to brand? This here diggin' wakes up the rheumatiz in my j'int's."

"What about milking the cows?" suggested Gerry.

Kemp actually blushed. He cast a quick glance at Gerry to see if this was some weak witticism to be promptly resented but was reassured by the surprise in Gerry's face. "Stranger," he said, "I ain't never touched no cow with my *hands*. If you want I should rope 'em an' hog-tie 'em, I'm your man but some missus will have to take the milk away f'm 'em."

Gerry threw back his head and laughed but his laugh was stopped short by the glint in Kemp's eye. "That's

all right, Kemp," he said. "The missus is milking them, right now. What's the matter with you just taking a holiday? You've done a hard ride and it won't hurt you to have a loaf."

Kemp wandered off to the house with solemn face. When Gerry came in to the midday meal, he found him with a saddle propped on the arm of a bench giving the delighted swaddled heir to Fazenda Flores his first lesson in equitation.

That night they sat again on the veranda steps but Kemp was not talkative. He whittled a stick until it disappeared in a final curly shaving and then immediately started on a fresh one.

"Known Lieber long?" asked Gerry at last.

"Goin' on two years," replied Kemp.

"Does he live off his stock?"

Kemp looked up. "Have n't you ever b'en up to Lieber's?"

"No," said Gerry, "it's two years since I came here and I've never been off the place. Lieber's been down here a couple of times."

Kemp grunted but asked no further question. "Lieber," he said, "c'tainly don't live offen his stock — he plays with it. Lieber is the goatskin king. Ships 'em by the thousand bales. If you or any other man in these parts was to sell a goatskin away f'm Lieber, you'd be boycotted. Lieber on this range is God — you're fer him or you're ag'in' him an' there ain't be'n any one ag'in' him for some spell now."

"Oh," said Gerry.

"As fer knowin' him," continued Kemp, "everybody

on this round-up knows Lieber but there ain't anybody knows why he is. Lieber holds questions and small-pox about alike. He ain't thar when they happen."

CHAPTER XXV

LIEBER, accompanied by two herders, came early for his stock. He greeted Kemp warmly. "Going my way?" he asked.

"I b'en loafin' around here with that in mind," drawled Kemp. "I'll take a hand if you'll allow me a mount."

"You can take your pick," said Lieber, "that is, after Mr. Lansing has had his."

The three of them walked into the pasture. Lieber looked at the stock with kindling eyes. He turned to Gerry and held out his hand. "Shake," he said, and Gerry did. "What do you say to the first five of the horses out and the last ten of the cattle for your share?"

Gerry flushed. "That's more than fair," he said. "You know the best of the horses will lead the bunch and the fattest of the cattle will lag behind. You see, they're all strong now."

"That's just it," said Lieber. "They're all strong now and if you had n't taken 'em over they'd have been mostly dead by now. I'm satisfied — more than satisfied — and if you are too, why it's all right."

The herders were sent to the upper gap to head in the first five out. Kemp, who had seized one of the saddled horses and was already mounted, cut horses out from cattle and with a whoop carried them towards

the lower gap. A beautiful iron-gray gelding broke away from the bunch and trotted up to Gerry to nose at his pockets. Five horses sprang through the gap and Lieber headed back the rest. He turned to Gerry with a smile but the light had gone out of Gerry's face. He stood, with head hanging, his arm across the arched neck of the iron-gray. Lieber strode over to him, his silver spurs jingling. He laid a big hand on Gerry's shoulder. The gelding sprang back with a snort. "That's all right, boy," said Lieber. "I would n't give the roan out yonder for two of him. Will you trade even?"

"You can have the lot for this one," said Gerry with a laugh.

"No," said Lieber gravely, "just the roan."

Kemp had gone off to round up his mule. He came up from the river driving it before him. At every jump he caught the mule a flick with his rope and the mule kicked and squealed but came on with long, stiff-legged strides. "Hi-yi!" yelled Kemp and snatched off his hat to beat his mount while he kept the rope-end flickering over the mule.

Gerry and Lieber laughed. Kemp was like a mummy come to sudden life. "Do you know what?" said Gerry, "I think I'll come along with you." He led the iron-gray out by his forelock and old Bonifacio hurried to help bridle and saddle him. Lieber mounted his stallion and turned the horses as they came out. Kemp suddenly sobered down to business. When Lieber had thrown back the last ten of the cattle, Kemp came out and closed the gap behind him.

"I think I'll go ahead with the horses," said Lieber.

"You go and take yo' men with you," said Kemp.

"I could drive this fat bunch from here to Kansas with nary a hand to spell me."

"Well, you'll have Mr. Lansing to help you," said Lieber and rode on to where his men were holding the horses in a milling, kicking mass. They passed over the bridge and away in a moving pillar of dust, for the desert had swallowed the first rains and was already crying for more. The cattle strung out and followed slowly in their trail. With whistle and yell Kemp urged on the laggards until he had the whole string well in hand. He kept them all traveling, slowly but steadily, and with never a word to Gerry. Toward evening his eye caught the glint of the sun on the white pillars and walls of a distant house. The house was in the midst of the desert. Beyond it loomed a single big joa tree. "Lieber's," said Kemp and Gerry nodded.

Gerry had expected a surprise of some sort when at last he arrived at Lieber's but the things he saw there, stranger than anything he could have imagined, left him calm and unmoved as though some prescience had prepared him. The house was built on the usual solid lines of plantation headquarters. Great, rough-hewn beams; towering rafters, built to carry the heavy tiles and to bear their burden for generations; unceiled, vast rooms with calcimined walls; all these were not outside Gerry's experience in the new land. The strangeness came with the rugs and the linen, the etchings and the furniture, and last and most significant,

the shelves and shelves of books and the tables piled with magazines in three languages. Everything bore the stamp of quality, everything had the distinction of a choice.

Gerry did not let his curiosity carry him beyond a rapid glance around the great living-room where they found Lieber, bathed and freshly dressed, superintending the making of ice in the latest ingenious contrivance for the pampering of the pioneer. The three men gathered about the curious machine and watched its jerky sway and swash. At one end was a great demi-john of acid, at the other a vacuum carafe, half filled with water. Their throats were parched and as the ice began to form and solidify they maintained a silence that was almost ceremonial.

Ice to them was a sort of national emblem. It carried them back. Varied memories accompanied each stage of its formation — memories of frost and the blazing woods, of cool long drinks and half-forgotten revelries. Lieber broke the silence, offering a choice of wine or whisky, but Gerry shook his head at both and Kemp, after a lingering look at the squat bottle, followed suit. Lieber half filled three glasses with the ice and added filtered water. They drank and filled again. Ice water in the desert! It made them smile on each other as though they had found some undiscovered elixir. "Ice water in the desert," thought Gerry and the phrase seemed to him more than words — it seemed to paint Lieber dimly, but as the mind saw him.

The veranda at Lieber's was like that of Fazenda Flores only much bigger. It looked out upon a wide

stretch of desert but away at the rim of the desert one could feel the river. The roar of the falls mumbled in the ear. It came from so far away that one had to strain one's ears to actually define it. After supper they gathered on the veranda. They sat in rude, raw-hide chairs which were comfortably strong and tilted them back to the national angle. Lieber and Gerry smoked corn-husk cigarettes but Kemp stuck to his yellow papers. Gerry did not want to talk. He sat where he could watch the strange pair whose companion he was for a night. Into the souls of Lieber and Kemp the long silences of solitude had entered and become at home. They were patient of silence. Speech had its restricted uses. They still had their hats on. Lieber's was pushed back, Kemp's was drawn forward. Kemp was whittling. Kemp's words of farewell came back to Gerry, "It's a long trail from the Alamo to New York but the whole country's under one fence." Texan, Pennsylvania Dutchman and New Yorker might be social poles but to-night they seemed strangely near to each other.

Lieber stopped plying a toothpick and broke the silence. "Did you find this tenderfoot any help to you, Kemp?"

Gerry had noticed from the first a certain hesitancy in Lieber's speech and a slight accent that was not so much foreign as colloquial. Lieber's talk was the talk of a man self-educated in culture. The books back there in the big living-room explained it. He had learned to talk from books.

Kemp closed up his knife deliberately, stuck his

hands in his pockets and stretched out his legs. His chair was tilted back in defiance of the laws of gravitation. "Consider'ble time ago now I used ter sling the name of tende'foot around pretty free," he remarked in his low drawl, "but a little shrimp f'm the States, beggin' your pa'don, Mr. Lansing, come out to Coaltown some years back and taught me 'nd some others that the 's some tende'foots born west of the Mississipp'."

Kemp paused to give comment a chance to shut him up but Lieber and Gerry sat like relics of a stone age. Kemp went on. "This young feller was a lunger 'nd thin so you c'd look through him and even in health he c'd n't a b'en bigger than a minute. He was so insignificant that nobody took notice on him, even to frame up a badger fight. He jest natu'ally was n't wo'th the trouble. The' was only one thing he c'd do. He c'd ride and Sam Burler said he c'd n't rightly do that. Sam explained that the hosses thought he was only a fly and never done no more'n whisk the' tails to get him off.

"Well, one afternoon the' was ten of us sittin' on the gallery of The Lone Star, some waitin' fo' somebody to set 'em up and some fo' the poker game to sta't, when along comes this here shrimp on Crossbreed, the pride qua'terbred race-hoss of the hull range. The' was n't man ner woman in the township that would n't a-backed Crossbreed to beat the sun to daylight and Crossbreed knowed his dooty — he brought the money back every time. Well, 's I say, along comes the Shrimp a-ridin' in f'm the Gap, lookin' kin' o' white around the gills. We'd seen the hoss whu'l with him some

ways down the road 'nd he 'd only saved himse'f by the ho'n, 'nd pullin' leather gene'ally.

" 'Well, young feller,' says Sam Burler, ' 'ol' Crossbreed 's some playful to-day. You b'en holdin' him in consider'ble I s'pose 'nd he 's gettin' onpatient.'

" 'Holdin' him in!' says the Shrimp. 'He don't need no holdin' in, 'nd the only thing he 's ever onpatient about is his feed!'

" At them words we all rared up. All on us knowed that when Crossbreed was a bit playful he c'd side-step over a house, absent-minded like. Sam Burler looked the Shrimp over kind o' evil 'nd says, 'I s'pose you seen lots o' hosses that c'd beat him.'

" 'Yes,' says the Shrimp, 'I have 'nd what 's more I got twenty dollars in my pocket that says that with two hund'ed ya'ds sta't I c'n beat him to the Gap on my ol' cayuse.'

" Well, strangers, there ain't no tende'foot anywheres too insignif'cant to rob. We all dug out money or borrowed it and sure enough the Shrimp he took us fo' two dollars each. They picked on me to ride Crossbreed. The' was the usual conditions — bareback and stockin' feet 'nd a quirt but no spurs.

" Well, the' ain't much mo' to tell. Sam Burler paced off the Shrimp's sta't and placed him 'nd then Shorty Doolittle let off a shotgun and we was away. Ol' Crossbreed was sure hungry. He chawed up that road like it was carrots in spring and befo' the Shrimp 'nd his sleepy cayuse was half way to the Gap we passed 'em an' then somethin' happened so terr'ble sudden that I 'm wonderin' about it yet. All I know is that one

minute I was facin' the same way as Crossbreed an' the nex' I was in the air facin' his tail. I landed in the ditch about the time he got back to the boys that was too ho'ified to stop him an' when I looked up I seen the Shrimp beatin' his cayuse past me. An' jest then my eyes an' nose opened. I made out to discover the ca'cass of Sam Burler's ol' gray that me an' Sam had dragged into that ditch three days befo'. I don't have to tell you that no hoss with blood in him will pass a ca'cass.

"It took the Shrimp conside'able time to get even his old cayuse past it, an' it took him some longer to ride to the Gap an' back than it did me to get to The Lone Star 'nd I was walkin' slow with some limp. When he finally did get back he was lookin' jest a shade meeker'n his old cayuse, an' he got a solemn welcome. Sam Burler ma'ched in behind the bar an' we followed him. He handed over fo'ty dollars to the Shrimp an' he says, says Sam, 'Gent'men, I reckon the drinks is on all on us but the house sets 'em up.' An' that Shrimp says he was n't drinkin' but he'd have a two-bits segar if Sam did n't mind. The 's tende'foots 'nd tende'foots."

There was a broad grin on Gerry's face when Kemp's low monotone faded out altogether and a smile in Lieber's blue eyes but neither said a word. From the corral came the grunts and sighs of cattle bedding down. Horses stamped in the stables. Over the great warehouses where Lieber stored and sorted his goatskins the moon crept into view. From the men's quarters came the throb of a guitar accompanying a wailing, plaintive

voice. There was the smell of living things in the air. Through it all and so interwoven with life that its solemn undernote was forgotten, sounded the distant, incessant boom of the falls.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE next morning Gerry was up early, nervous after his first night's absence from Fazenda Flores. Kemp watched him saddle his horse. "That ain't one of the five," he remarked.

"No," said Gerry. "I traded the roan for the iron-gray. Do you think I was done?"

"I ain't sayin'," said Kemp cautiously. "I don't want you should think I was teachin' you, Mr. Lansing, but that hoss ain't no iron-gray. There ain't no such color for a hoss as I ever heern tell on. That hoss is a blue an' he's a true blue."

"All right, Kemp," said Gerry, smiling. "You've named him true blue and True Blue he is from this day."

Lieber came out in pajamas and called them for coffee. When they were seated he proposed to Kemp that he make his headquarters at the ranch for a while. The advantages were evident. It was a congregating point for the natives from miles round. Goatskins came into Lieber's from hundreds of miles up country. They came singly, in donkey loads or in whole pack-trains. Sometimes they passed directly into his hands from the producer; sometimes they ran through a chain of transfers, from hand to hand. All news centered at and radiated from Lieber's. The same men that

brought in goatskins would be glad to add orchids to their stock in trade.

Kemp grunted his thanks. He had waited two years for this offer. The realization of the obligation Lieber was putting him under embarrassed him. He began to talk. "These greasers," he said, "take a lot o' teachin' sometimes, an' sometimes they don't. F'r instance, you can tell 'em that Cattleyas are wo'th money and that the rest o' their parasites ain't, 'nd after they seen you throw Bu'lin'tonias an' Oncidiums an' Miltonias into the discard fo' three months steady, they begin to sober down to jest Cattleyas 'nd realize that it's no use holdin' a four-flush against a workin' pair."

At the scientific names dropping so incongruously from Kemp's lips, Gerry stopped eating and looked up. Lieber's face wore the smile of one who had heard it before but is quite willing to hear it all over again.

"But," continued Kemp, "yo' c'n pull till you're blin' an' you can't head 'em around to see that onless a Cattleya has eight leaves, it's too young to be packed an' no good to the market besides bein' a victim to race suicide.

"As to their bringin' in Bu'lin'tonias an' Oncidiums an' Miltonias, I never get onpatient o' that. How c'n a greaser ever learn that a *Miltonia Spectabilis Moreliana* that looks like pigeon's blood in a pu'ple shadow ain't a commercial proposition, while the *Cattleya* is? When he's in the woods an' a smell straight f'm heaven draps its rope on him an' he looks up an' sees a droopin' spike o' snow, how you goin' to teach

him that a Bu'lin'tonia Fragrans ain't just as good business as a Labiata?

"Time was when orchids was an ambition; now they's jest a business. If God-a'mighty had n't a scattered 'em through the ends o' the earth an' given 'em wings to fly an' claws to hold on half way up to heav'n the'd be an orchid trust right now an' orchids would be classed on the ma'ket with bananas. Last time I was hum I seen a bunch o' Cattleyas in O'Riley's window in El Paso. Seemed like a bit o' po'try had jumped the fence 'nd landed in O'Riley's heart. In my mind's eye I seen him impo'ting them plants an' nursin' 'em an' turnin' out early in the mo'nin's, watchin' fo' 'em to bloom. I went in an' had a talk. Well, gent'men, the' was n't no po'try in O'Riley's orchids. It had been strained out with a separator. Them plants was growed by a nursery back East and shipped out to O'Riley by fast freight when they was in bud at so much per plant. When the blooms was used up, he shipped the plants back an' got a fresh lot. He put a price of two fifty a bloom on the flowers an' when he found they was sellin' he put it up to five dollars. He said them flowers was wo'th more'n a column o' advertisin' space in the El Paso Blizzard an' cost a dern sight less.

"In Eurup, it's some different. They's collectors hankerin' after new varieties an' houses that keeps men lookin' for 'em but in America, you ma'k me, if an orchid don't make up well on the missus' bodice or on the table, it ain't business; an' they's a few million children growin' up to the idea that if it ain't a Cattleya it ain't an orchid.

"When I come out the fust time the house told me I c'd shove in a few samples of the varieties outside the reg'lar line; they'd come in handy for flower shows 'nd an occasional collector. An' I did. I shoved 'em in plenty. An' the house wrote me they was n't runnin' a curiosity shop an' that Americans was n't buyin' gold bricks so's to exhaust the stock they had on hand an' if I did n't mind would I please *confine* myse'f to commercial orchids. Commercial orchids. That's my mount an' I'm ridin' him steady but I can't he'p thinkin' that they's many a missus back hum, an' man too, that would catch the' breath to see the blood pu'ple of a *Miltonia* lookin' up from its green leaves or to smell the smell of the Bu'lin'tonia — a smell that can talk an' say things that a man can't."

Kemp came to himself, blushed and hurried out as if on urgent business. Lieber looked at Gerry's thoughtful face and smiled. "Who'd have thought he'd ever talk that way in daylight?" he said.

"I think," replied Gerry, "it was your offering to let him make this place his headquarters. It rattled him and started him off. I could see he was grateful."

"Perhaps that was it," said Lieber. "He's a queer one. He never asked me. It just occurred to me to suggest it because I'm getting to enjoy having Kemp around. Look at last night."

Gerry nodded. His eyes fell on the clock and he got up with a start. The sun was at its highest when he reached Fazenda Flores. He caught sight of Father Mathias' great white umbrella on the bridge and urged True Blue into a final gallop. But Father Mathias was

not under his umbrella. Instead, Gerry found Margarita and her toddling son. "Thou hast been away a long time," said Margarita reproachfully. "The priest is at the house and I took his umbrella that I and the Man might watch for thee in the sun."

Gerry jumped off his horse and kissed her. Then he picked up his son and set him in the saddle. Margarita screamed. True Blue arched his neck and looked cautiously around at his featherweight burden. The young horse stood very still while Margarita fought past Gerry's arm and dragged the Man from his perilous perch to her bosom. And manlike the Man protested with a bad-tempered, whole-lunged wail that rent the air and brought Dona Maria and the priest to the corner of the house to peer at them with eyes shaded under cupped hands.

A few days later the rains came in earnest. Unceasing torrents that drew a continual hum from the tiles of the roof, sought out cracks, forgotten during the long dry season, and dripped in to remind the cozy household that outside the whole world was wet.

Gerry spent two days in the wet closing his sluiceway and shoring it from the inside against eventualities. Then he repaired to the house and after lavishing his enforced idleness on his son for a day or two, began to work feverishly on further knick-knacks for the house. Occasionally he sallied out and climbed the slippery roof to mend a leak, Margarita, frightened, taking her stand in the rain to guard over him with disconcerting cries and warnings. When, occasionally, there happened to be a truce to the downpour, he hurried out with

Bonifacio to battle against prolific weeds that sprang to weird heights in a night.

The rains passed. Gerry contracted with Lieber for labor to be paid for in produce. Fazenda Flores blossomed and bore fruit. People began to come in from afar to barter for produce and a buyer appeared and took over the whole of the little cotton crop. Gerry poured money into Margarita's lap — more money than she had ever seen — and sent her under escort of Dona Maria and Bonifacio and the Man to purchase all of comfort and furbelows that the tiny market of Piranhas could supply.

They were to be gone two days and Gerry left the Fazenda in charge of his foreman to go and spend the time with Lieber and Kemp. He found Kemp in a sort of controlled elation over the greatest shipment of commercial orchids the trade had ever known. Just after Gerry's arrival two men appeared bearing a monster plant of over two hundred leaves strung, like the grape cluster of Eschol, on a pole.

Kemp's deep-set eyes seemed to grow out of his head as he made out their burden. "Hi-yi!" he yelled and rushed off to the corral where he threw himself on to an astonished heifer. For one second she squatted and then went mad. With yell and flogging hat Kemp poured oil on the fire of her frenzy. She bucked and twisted and all but somersaulted in her efforts to rid herself of the demon on her back. On the veranda, Lieber and Gerry held their sides and roared at the most grotesque fine riding they had ever seen. Finally, with a desperate lunge, the heifer breasted the corral fence.

It caught her middle and she teetered over. Kemp turned a handspring from her back and landed on his feet. The heifer scrambled free from the fence and tore, wild-eyed, out into the desert. Laughter rang from every side. Three herders threw themselves on to their horses and rode, shouting, after the heifer. Kemp straightened out his hat, put it on, and walked sedately over to the veranda. There was only a faint glint in his eye as he bought the monster plant to crown the monster shipment.

CHAPTER XXVII

ON Red Hill it was raining, not in a downpour but in vast veils of mist that swayed to the breeze, caressing the hills and hiding the valleys. It had been raining for three days.

After lunch Clem had gone to her room and then had come down again and wandered from window to window, tapping the panes, and with her forefinger tracing the course of the drops of water hurrying down outside.

She went to the veranda at the back of Maple House and searched the west in vain for a gleam of sunlight, then she came in again and sat down before her little writing-table in the corner of the library. She dropped the lid. On the blotter lay an opened letter. She had read it before. She picked it up and read it again. "I do not write," it ran, "to the Clem I met the other day as I stepped out from J. Y.'s building. I do not know her and she does n't know me. I am afraid of her, not for what she is but for what she can steal from me. I write to the little Clem — the Clem of the days that won't come back — the Clem that has stood at my knee and clapped her hands and wept at the same time over the fate of a Very Real Dragon That Was Not. Dear Little Clem, what bewildering company you are keeping! What has become of those lanky legs, those

thin bare arms and those flounney short skirts that were so very much out of the way? You have abandoned them. How could you when you knew I loved them just so! And you are hiding in the vision of flesh and furs and broadcloth that put me to rout in front of J. Y.'s.— that tied my tongue and twisted it so that when it got loose it said the things that were furthest from my heart. I know you are there because the eyes that looked out at me before they crinkled up were your very own.

"Clem, it's hard for me to spread my heart on paper. Warm words get chilled in the tub of ink and belie themselves. There is only one way and that is just to tell you that in spite of how things may look and seem my *heart is warm*. Without understanding you can forgive a warm heart, can't you?

"I told you I'd bring back my other self and send him to you. I failed. Not because I did n't have him with me but because I wanted to send him to you without the rest of me and could n't.

"I can't tell you why I could n't. You must understand it without telling. I can only say that even to-day men are tested by fire. It's a fire one can't smother — it would only smolder on. One must let it burn out. It burns out the half of a man and some men don't know which half is going to be burned out until it's all over. It is that way with me. My soul is a furnace. I could n't bring it too near for fear it would scorch you. There, I have written too much. If you find that the words are cold when they get to you, warm them at the fire of your child heart. Alan."

The Clem that read this letter looked very much a woman. She was nineteen, her hair was coiled up at the back of her neck, and her frock when she stood up almost hid her slim ankles. Alan's letter troubled her and made her feel even older than she was. It brought to her white forehead a tiny frown. Clem was as tanned as a long summer could brown her but above her brows the skin was quite white because she had such a lot of hair that there was always some of it breaking loose to shade her forehead.

Suddenly the frown vanished. Clem's full lips opened in a little smile and a glow stole into the tan of her cheeks. She jumped up and ran to the old pier glass in the parlor, otherwise known as the Seldom Room, so rarely was it invaded.

Clem pulled down her hair and shook it out. Then she took a bright red ribbon from a whisk broom hanging on the wall and gathering her hair at the back of her neck, tied it with a bow. With the instinct of a woman she looked for pins and found them. She turned up her skirts in a broad pleat and pinned them. She had to do it several times over to get the tucks just right and the hang just so. She shook her head to tumble her hair and turned for a last look in the glass. She was a little girl once more. Her eyes laughed back at her. They were half light, half shadow. They seemed to understand her.

Clem ran back to the library. A shaft of sunlight struck across Alan's open letter. She snatched up the letter and tucked it in her bosom. Then she followed the shaft of sunlight on to the back veranda.

For a moment she stood poised before sinking to a seat on a bench. She crossed her knees and smiled at her slim, well-shaped legs. It was so long since she had consciously seen them that they were almost strangers. Then she forgot them, braced her hands on the bench at each side of her, threw back her head, filled her lungs with the keen air and felt her heart begin to pulse with the pulse of the living Hill.

Her eyes grew large and dreamy. In their depths were swirling clouds, chased by a growing light. Her eyes mirrored the world of Red Hill after rain. Clem's head slowly dropped until her chin rested on her bosom. She locked her hands about her knees. Then, with a last look about her, she rose slowly, slipped in and sat down at her desk.

"Dear Alan," she wrote, "this is not a letter about you and me but just only about Red Hill. We've had a Northeaster — not a blusterer, but one of those sleepy ones that rains and rains like a baby crying because it's lonely. And now the third day and the storm are over and the sun has come out. You know what that means, Alan. Red Hill is n't exactly laughing but it is smiling with that sweet first smile that comes to babies and hills while their cheeks are still wet with tears.

"The maples are still dripping, mostly at the edges, like big umbrellas. The firs look as if they had taken *their* bath in black paint and are busy making everything else in sight look white. The elms are waving their plumes at the vanishing plumes of mist as though they wanted to be polite but are n't very sorry to say

good-by. The sun, I am sorry to say, looks as if he had been drinking too much. He's very red and he's wearing a great spiked halo of rain shafts tipped at an absurd, rakish angle. He does n't seem a bit ashamed and the smile on his face looks as if he meant to make a night of it somewhere out of sight.

"Outdoors there's quite a nip in the air that makes you feel as though with the rest of the world you had just stepped out of a cold bath. But inside, Maple House is cozy and warm and I know that when presently I curl up on the lounge I shall feel like a chick nestling against its mama hen where the feathers are downiest.

"Maple House is very lonely just now because there are n't any other chicks about. Nance has taken her lot back to town because Charlie Sterling says they are quite full of health and he's fuller of loneliness. As for grown-ups, Uncle J. Y. is in town a great deal this summer on account of other people's money and the old Captain never gets out of bed since he had a stroke. He says there's nothing the matter with *him*; it's the modern whisky that has lost its tone.

"So I'm mostly alone with Aunt, and Maple House seems almost too big to fit. But it is n't a bit too big when I stop to think because I know that the old house does n't stand for any one of us alone,—it has to keep a nook for every one of its scattered brood.

"That's the dear thing about Maple House—it is always waiting. And that's what makes it Home. Sometimes in the lonely nights I wake up into a dream and the old house is ringing with the sounds of the children of a hundred years at play. They laugh and

sometimes they cry but there is one that never laughs or cries. He is a chubby little boy with awfully staring eyes for a baby and he carries a wooden sword and a paper drum. It's the old Captain, I'm sure, and once you have seen him as a chubby soldier of three you'll begin to know the secret of Maple House — that it's waiting for us to come back young or old. And if you are very, very still for a very long time you can hear the old house breathe, and then you know that in every closet and in every corner it has hidden away a beating heart. It never loses one.

“Dear Alan, when I started to write this letter I was quite a little girl — now I find I'm quite grown up. I'm sorry. But it only goes to prove that you are wrong, and that it takes more than a half to make up one's self. Clem.”

CHAPTER XVIII

THAT dry season saw the beginning of a drought that will long hold the blackest page in the annals of the San Francisco basin. It seemed but days after the rains when the sparse grass and new-leafed bushes of the wilderness began to shrivel up. Day after day the sun leaped brazen, from the horizon to the sky, his first level rays searching out the scant, stored moisture of wilting foliage, and the very sap of the hardy brush. While the cattle were still fat they became weak and turned to cactus for nourishment. They broke down the sickly branches with their horns and rubbed them in the sand to free them of the worst of the thorns. Herders rode the rounds on weakening horses and dismounted time and again to pull out spines from the snouts of passive, panting cows. Bulls died of broken pride. They would not subject themselves to the pain of eating cactus. The river — the great river — was no longer great. It grumbled with a weak voice from deep down in the gorge. Gerry watched its falling level with anxious eye and one day sent an urgent call to Lieber for help.

Lieber came. He brought with him an army, every man bearing with him the tool that had come soonest to his hand. Spades were few and hoes; the bright shares of a pick or two caught the light like lances. Most of

the men depended on the heavy sheath knives they carried at their sides. They looked like an army of sansculottes as they swarmed into the ditch and began to dig. In two days they had sunk it to the required level. When they finished Gerry rode back with them to help bring down Lieber's weakening stock.

Kemp had stayed in sole possession at Lieber's. Digging was not in his line, so he had volunteered to hold the fort against the return of the garrison. He welcomed Lieber and Gerry to a supper of his own making in approved cowboy style: sour-dough biscuits made by a master hand, steaks cut from a freshly killed calf and fried before toughness set in, a pile of creamy mashed spuds. There was a homeliness about the meal that made them eat in silence. They felt as though for years they had been worshiping false culinary gods. The pile of steaks, the heaped potatoes, the hot biscuit, were exotics, strayed into a land of pepper sauces and garlic. The supper seemed to the three men to take on a personality and to be ill at ease, but it was they that were ill at ease for the supper reminded them that they were exiles.

The silence on the veranda that night was even longer than usual. Gerry's mind went back to a French book that he had bought in desperation at Pernambuco. He had ploughed through half of it and with a catch in his thoughts he remembered that it lay open on the table when he left his little room in Piranhas on the morning of mornings that had broken life in two. Some of its phrases, conned over and over again in his struggle with the half-forgotten idiom, came back to him. "*La*

parole est du temps, le silence de l'éternité." He smiled to himself at the twisted meaning the long silence of his companions gave to the words.

Then the smile left his face. He remembered the argument. The instinct we all have for superhuman truths tells us that it is dangerous to be silent with those we would keep at a distance, for words pass and are forgotten between men, but silence — active silence — is forever ineffaceable. True life — the moments of life that leave a trace — is made up of silence. Not passive silence; that is but another name for sleep. But the active silence that breaks down barriers, pierces walls, and turns the life of every day into a life where all is intense, where there is no ban — nothing forbidden — where laughter dare not enter, where subjection is submerged and where all — all, is remembered.

Gerry felt that this active silence had come upon them. These men were being borne into the silent sphere of his own soul. He felt restless — afraid. He decided to speak. He was on the point of speaking when Lieber let down his chair softly, clasped his hands and broke the silence.

"Last night I dreamed I heard the blast of a steamer's horn and when I woke up the cold sweat was on my forehead because I know that there is no desert, no wilderness, so far from the things you would forget that dreams cannot follow you to it."

He stopped and silence fell upon them again. Lieber stared straight in front of him, out into the night. His face worked as though he were struggling to keep his lips closed. When he began to speak again, the words

were scarcely audible. "I don't know why I want to tell you two about why I am here, unless it is that as we sat here so quiet I felt that you knew it all — that you knew all that I know and that I was on the point of knowing all that you have known. The little lies of life suddenly became big and hateful and I saw in my life a monster lie that the silence was exposing.

"There are lots of men with the beginning of my story. It's common and takes little telling. I was born in Pennsylvania. We were mighty poor farmers but I got all the schooling there was within walking distance of home. My old man saw to that. When I was still a boy our little bank took me in. It was n't doing much business then but a couple of years later the region struck oil and the bank's business soared by leaps and bounds. It turned into as good a spouter as any of the wells. The family that ran it became rich and went to higher jobs or out altogether. The staff was shoved up and about the time I was of age I was handling more money than I'd ever known was in the world. The amount I stole was an even thirty thousand and I got away with it. It was easier to do thirty years ago than it is to-day. I got away with it and then it got away with me. It lasted me a year and four months and I saw the end of it up the coast at Pernambuco.

"I date my birth from the day I spent the last dollar and woke up. I worked. Nothing was too small or too big for me to handle. I got something to risk and then I risked it. I risked it again and again. After ten years I could draw my check for thirty thousand plus

interest and I did. I sent the check to the little bank back home. I waited two months for the answer and then it came; my check torn across and a short letter saying that the loss had already been met by a bankers' surety association. I wrote the association a dozen letters and some of them took some writing. In the last I offered fourfold the theft. There had been plenty of Bible in my bringing-up. They wrote back that it was no use — that I could keep on climbing in price but it was their business to jail me for fifteen years the first chance they got and they'd do it the minute I set foot where they could grab me.

"That letter frightened me.. I began to realize that what I'd been working for was n't money, or honor, or rehabilitation but just the right to go back — the right to go back home.

"Nobody had been harder on me than my old man. For years nobody in the house was allowed to say my name and if he saw a letter from me he threw it in the fire, opened or unopened. But somehow it got to him that I had offered to pay fourfold and that I'd been refused and that turned him. It was the fourfold that did it — the divine and sacred measure of justice. He started to fight for me as hard as he'd ever fought against. And then he died and my old mother died. Letters stopped. My brothers and sisters were coming up in the world. They could n't afford to own a thief much less fight for him. So the letters stopped.

"I spent money then. I built me a house in Pernambuco that was a wonder palace and I started in to forget. But when you've been remembering with all

your might, the color of the paper on the walls of home, the lay of the wood-pile, of the sheds and the tumbling barn and stables, the holes in the fence, the friendly limbs of apple trees and the smell of hay; when you've been coddling bare memories of simple things like those for fifteen years, you can't turn around on your inside self and forget.

"There's a flag the sight of which makes my heart come up into my throat and tears to my eyes. You think I mean the Stars and Stripes, but I don't. I mean the Blue Peter that flies at the halliards of big ships and says to everybody that takes the trouble to look, 'We sail to-day.' Over the tops of the houses I've seen that flag blinking in the heavens like a bit of deep blue sea married to a white cloud and to me it always said, 'We sail for home to-day.' I'd shut my eyes or close the blinds but what was the use of that? Night and day I could hear the bellow of the great horns — a blast for good-by and another for a challenge to the sea — as the big boats headed out for home.

"I could n't stand it. I came up here. And now, last night, I dreamed that I heard it in my sleep — up here. Gentlemen, a man without a country is in a bad way but a man without a home even if it's a hovel — well — we all know the old song." He paused to master his voice. Then in a whisper that they just caught he added, "Home is the anchor of a man's soul. I want to go Home."

Lieber stopped talking. The revealing silence had done its work. It had brought them close — so close that he had spoken lest they take his soul by assault.

He left them and went to his own room. They saw he was an old man, beyond the years he had disclosed.

They did not speak. They were nervous. Kemp made a cigarette, puffed at it once or twice and then threw it away, to roll another a moment later. His thoughts were winging away to the fork of Big and Little Creek where a three-room shack stood in the shadow of the White Mountains of New Mexico. He had thought it small, miserable, cramped. But out here in the wilderness, thousands and thousands of miles away, it came back to his vision, glorified.

The purling, gentle waters, fringed near the mountains with tall, still pines, banked down the valley with friendly cottonwoods, seemed another element from the sullen river rumbling across the night from its cruel gorge. The billowing range, stretching away from Little Creek till it met the sky, crested with twisted junipers and evergreen cedars, with its famous grama-grass undulating under cool breezes from the snow-capped mountains, seemed to call to his lungs with soft, breathing noises. And the Mountain — the Mountain that winter and summer had kept its white, dazzling summit before him, leading him back from the far round-up and the trail to the little shack in its shadow. A swelling came into his throat. He tried to cough it up. But as long as he thought of the Mountain, the thickness stuck in his throat. He took from his pocket a treasured cake of tobacco and with strong teeth tore off a generous portion. Then he rose and walked off to the corral.

Gerry sat on alone. Thoughts were troubling him,

too. What was he doing here? Who was this Margarita that had twined herself into his life? Was it his life? And her little boy — black-haired, black-eyed, olive-tinted — he was his boy, too. He was Gerry Lansing's son. No, not that — not Gerry Lansing's. Gerry Lansing belonged to a time that was far away, to a hill where white houses with green blinds peered out from the darkness of domed maples, from the long shadows of up-pointing firs and from the eaves of flaring elms, the wine-cups of heaven.

Gerry felt his spirit flying away to wander in cool lanes where birch and sassafras and rioting laurel burned incense under a kindly sun and slender wood-maples bent under the breeze against sturdy hickory and ash. It led him to look back upon the glory of the mountain-ash in autumn and of the turning of the leaves. A sigh came quivering through all his body and escaped from his trembling lips. "I am alone," he breathed to himself.

Never had he been alone before — never like that. For the first time in over two years he thought of his mother, of the Judge who had been a father to him, of all the Hill, of Alix, and then, of Alan. Where were Alix and Alan? Suddenly the vision of Margarita and her boy pushed in between him and memory. He sprang to his feet. His manhood rose within him and battled with her and the child against memory. He started off into the wilderness. His sandals shot spurts of sand and dust into the air behind him at every step. He smelt the dust. Above him, the myriad stars shone

dry and far, far up in the heavens. Heaven was farther from the world to-night than ever before.

Gerry came back at dawn. The herders were mounting to round up the stock. Gerry saddled his horse and went with them.

CHAPTER XXIX

DEEP in South America, on the ragged fringe of the outskirts of progress, Alan Wayne was pushing a long bridge across a dried-up watercourse. He was sick, tired, disgusted. Over and over again he had grumbled to McDougal that it was a job for a mason and McDougal had patiently answered, "I'm the mason, Mr. Wayne. Do you lie bye a wee and gie the fever a chance to get out of the body." But Alan stuck jealously to his job. Ten Percent Wayne might retire on his laurels but he could never be beaten.

Every third day the fever in his bones seized his body in a grip that could not be denied, shook it till it rattled and cast it down limp, cold and hot, teeth chattering and then clenched, and then chattering again. But on the days between Alan made up for the lapse. He became a devil hanging on the backs of his men and driving them to superhuman efforts. Terror held them. They were Italians, far from home. A wilderness stretched between them and the sea. The sea itself was none of theirs; it was but an added barrier. A madman had them in thrall. Terror drove them. It was a race to finish the bridge before he killed them. "I am going to be sick," he had told them in cold, rapid words, "I am going to be sick but before I'm finished the bridge is finished or —." He smiled and made a

gesture with his hand to show how he would brush them all off into the dry gorge. His smile terrified more than the raised hand.

The giant gang-boss, McDougal, stood by and nodded solemn confirmation. When Alan was ill by day, McDougal left him and drove the men in his stead but when the hour for knocking off came with the sudden eclipse of the sun by the horizon, he hurried to Alan's tent, fished him out from some corner on the floor, wrapped him in blankets, dosed him with quinine, tempted him with poor, weak broths and nursed him, unprotesting, through the night.

McDougal had followed Alan into strange lands and strange places and seen him in many a deep hole, and through it all Alan had been the same—a purring dynamo at work. He had been the same until this damned trip into the Brazilian wilderness and here a change had come over him. There were times when he talked and what he said was, “No more trips for me, McDougal. I’m a consulting engineer from this on.” McDougal had heard more than one man talk like that under fever and he frowned, trying to remember one of them that had ever come back.

Alan was inured to river fever. He had fought it often and when he saw the fetid pools of stagnant water in the dried-up water course he knew he would have to fight it again. Somehow, some night, a mosquito was bound to get at him, and the fever would begin. He doubled his preventive dose of quinine but he could not double his spirits for the battle. He came to the field with a gnawing at those sources of health,

a calm mind and sure sleep. Sleep did not come as of old after the day's work. Instead he tossed and twisted on his narrow cot and finally would turn on the electric torch to read two letters over and over again.

One he read with a curl of the lip. It was from a pretty woman that had fluttered into his life and out. He had forgotten her and now she had come back to buzz words in his buzzing ears. She said, "It costs a woman to learn that happiness is not really tangible. Between being fortunate and happy a gulf is fixed. I was fortunate — just not miserable — and stood on the brink of the gulf. Happiness brushed me with its wings. I reached out to catch it and the gulf took me. How long will it be before I climb back to the height that seemed not so very high when I possessed it? I don't know . . . I do not hate you,— only myself. You have known many women but you have not known me. That is the bitter part. You do not know what I gave you. One thing I ask you and the words as I write are blurred with tears like my eyes — if ever a foolish woman, honest and true as I was, offers you the same sacrifice, do not take it. I have suffered for all the women you will meet."

"Fool," said Alan to himself, "fool not to see that I turned her wish-washy weakness into strength and loosed a dumb tongue."

And then he drew out the other letter and the curl in his lip straightened out to a line of sweetness and the light in his eyes turned to a fiery, blind adoration. The letter had been sent to him, sealed, by J. Y., who had accompanied it with a note. The letter began, "To

my boy at Thirty," and ended, "With undying love, your friend and Mother." In life he could not remember his mother but he saw her now in three pages of laboring words traced by a dying hand. In herself, dying at thirty, she had seen her boy revealed. She had had no strength — no time — left for slow approaches. With the first words of her letter she laid a cooling hand on his burning soul. She spoke the all-seeing wisdom of death. She held him close to her heart and fed him with her life's blood. All that she had been, all that she had learned, all that she foresaw, was crowded into those three pages. They were brittle with age, the ink yellow and faded in words that no eyes but his and hers had ever seen. They gripped his soul and held it steady. Without this letter he would have torn up the other. But the other had come as a complement and he kept it because it helped him to see himself.

As Alan weakened, the bridge approached completion. Batches of men, as special work was finished, were despatched to the coast. With each batch McDougal strove to send his master but Alan was too weak to go though he did not say so. He had realized it with terror and then with calm. "No, McDougal, not this time," he would say, and finally, "I think I might just as well stay on till they send up to take over. It's unprofessional to chuck it before. It won't be long now." And McDougal had cursed low rolling oaths and taken it out on the men.

Alan seemed to have become childish in his weakness. He spent what strength he had left in cutting words into a board ripped from a kerosene box. When he had

finished he called McDougal and showed him his handiwork. "McDougal," he said, "if anything should happen to keep me here permanently just cut these words into some big rock and lay me under it. Be careful you get them just so. The French are mighty particular about the way we use their lingo and while it was n't a Frenchman that wrote this bit I guess he'd be just as particular."

"Aweel, sir," said McDougal, stifling his rage within him, "I'll do as you wish." He took the board and looked at it. The words meant nothing to him but the scene meant much. He went out and concluded his agreement with twelve quiet, lowering men gathered from the country side. They were pioneers without knowing it. They and their fathers and their fathers' fathers had held these far depths of the world against wild beasts and drought and flood since, centuries ago, the Jesuits swept through the subcontinent and left a trail of settlers behind them. They were proud, narrow, independent. They were uninventive, unimaginative. No man among them had ever thought to lie. They did not steal though they were robbed whenever they invaded civilization with their wares.

From them McDougal had learned that due east, halfway to the sea, was a place called Lieber's and that this Lieber was known as the *Americano* and had fame as a *curador* of fevers. Four men could carry a sick man to Lieber's in a hammock in four days. Twelve men could do it in two, and quicker than that a hundred men could not go. For the price of three steers each — two-year olds — they would undertake

to deliver the sick man at Lieber's in two days. McDougal pondered. It was a chance. If he sent Alan to the rail-head there would n't be even a chance. There was no one who could help at the rail-head, nor along the thin line, nor even at the coast.

"In two days," said he despairingly, "the master will be dead."

They gathered at the door of Alan's tent and looked in at him as he lay half comatose. "No," said the oldest of them, "he will be dead in seven days' time."

As McDougal picked him up and laid him gently in a hammock, Alan came to. The hammock was padded with pillows and blankets and strung on a stout bamboo pole with two men at each end supporting it.

"What are you doing with me?" he asked angrily and sank back into the pillows. From there his eyes glared up at McDougal.

"I'm sending ye home," said McDougal gently but firmly.

Alan smiled a twisted smile. "Sending me home," he repeated and added resignedly, "Oh, all right." Then he started up. "Bring matches," he said. McDougal took matches from his pocket. Alan drew two letters from inside his coat. "Burn them." He held them out and watched jealously as McDougal opened out the sheets with averted eyes and set fire to the thin paper. The filmy cinders blew hither and thither under the light breeze. The men under the pole moved nervously, anxious to be off. Their eight companions wheeled their flea-bitten ponies and headed for the trail. "No, you don't," shouted McDougal

and explained with many gestures that they were to ride behind on account of the dust.

"We know, master," answered one quietly, "we would but start."

McDougal held out an awkward hand in farewell. "You're ready, Mr. Wayne?"

"Yes," said Alan between chattering teeth, and then cried, "No, I want the board — my epitaph thing, you know."

McDougal dived into the tent and brought out the board with the roughly cut words that he could not read but somehow began to understand. He slipped it into the hammock behind the cushions and then just touched Alan's hand and gave the word to the men. They started off in a shambling, rapid trot. The horse-men fell in behind. A cloud of dust cut them off from McDougal's gaze. He turned and fell upon his laboring squad with a rolling flood of curses. To them the words were Greek, but nevertheless, their blood curdled and they worked as only Wayne had taught them.

CHAPTER XXX

LIEBER, with Gerry and Kemp, sat in the shade of the veranda, smoking after the midday meal. The stock had been corralled but, on Kemp's advice, the start for Fazenda Flores was to be made half-way through the afternoon. There was to be a great moon that night and the drive would be robbed of the perils of darkness to cattle as well as of the horrible heat.

The three were silent, half somnolent, when a passing herder grunted and pointed westward with his chin. Lieber stood up and looked. A pillar of dust was coming across the desert. He could see men riding and something else. He took his field-glasses from a peg and looked again. "Funeral, or a sick man," he said and sat down to wait. Kemp started whittling to keep himself awake. Since the hour of Lieber's confession he had hardly spoken.

When the cavalcade came within easy view Gerry stood up and watched. He could not hide his curiosity like Lieber and Kemp. In front of the horses came four men bearing a sagging hammock on a pole. They were running in quick, springy steps that made the hammock sway gently from side to side. The pace they kept up under the burden was marvelous. They were followed closely by eight horsemen. At the first signs of faltering among the bearers, four of the riders

would throw themselves off their ponies and run under the pole. The change of relay was made without a stop, without a pause. The freed ponies stood with hanging heads and straddled legs. Even from a distance one could see that the burdened men had run the wiry little beasts off their feet. They were all in, but the men were still erect — keen. With a final spurt the cortège drew up before the veranda. Lieber stood up. "Dead or dying?" he asked.

"Master, we do not know," answered the oldest of the men, their leader.

"Fever or smallpox?" asked Lieber.

"Fever."

With a look of relief Lieber went down the steps to the hammock. A sheet had been thrown over the pole to keep off the worst of the sun. He pulled it off. A ghastly sight met his eyes, but he did not shrink. "Bring him up here," he said, springing up the steps and sweeping a saddle harness and some old magazines off a great rawhide settle on the veranda.

They laid the sick man on the settle and Lieber started to strip him with gentle, deft hands. Kemp strode forward and helped but Gerry stood by, powerless to move. He had recognized Alan, the man he had sworn to break if ever he met him. Somebody else had broken Alan, terribly, pitilessly. Gerry's eyes shrank from the sight. A lump came into his throat. Alan was dead. Alan with whom he had wandered barefoot through those quiet lanes of home, with whom he had fished and swum, and once had fought. What a little fury Alan had been in that boys' battle! It had

not been fought to a finish. On one impulse they had stopped and looked at each other and turned away, ashamed to shake hands.

Lieber, once heavy, florid and clumsy, was transformed. He worked quickly with sure hands. The body lay stripped on the settle. Under it still lay the hammock and dusty blankets. The pillows and a board had been tossed on the floor. Lieber examined his patient minutely, without haste. The spleen was frightfully distended and pushed out across the abdomen. He could feel its hard, unyielding margins. The feet were swollen. The face was yellow with the sickly gray-yellow of molded straw. Coma had set in.

Lieber dragged a great medicine chest out from his room. With alcohol he rapidly washed out the dust-filled nostrils of the stricken man and bathed the face and then the limbs and body. Then he took out a hypodermic syringe and a graduated glass. In the glass he dissolved a powder and with steady hands added measured drops of a liquid of faint amber hue.

Gerry found his tongue. "What is it?" he asked.

"Quinine and arsenic," said Lieber shortly.

"Arsenic? Is n't that dangerous?" said Gerry.

Lieber glanced at him. "It will probably kill him."

"Then why — why —" protested Gerry. A great desire to protect what was left of Alan had come over him.

"Why?" said Lieber dryly, "I'll tell you, Mr. Lansing. Because it is less cowardly to kill a man than to let him die."

He mixed the solution in the syringe and then, grasping Alan's thin arm, he pressed it until the veins came out in a swelling network. "Hold his arm like that," he commanded Kemp. Kemp clutched the arm. The bones seemed to bend to the grip. Lieber chose a swollen vein and pierced it with the needle. He forced the dose into the blood. "There," he said with a smile to Gerry, "that's what's known as an intravenous administration of quinine and arsenic. If another paroxysm hits him he's done for but we'll know all about that in forty-eight hours' time."

He went into the house and brought out clean sheets, soft woolen blankets, pillows, and pillow-slips. Kemp had never seen such linen; Gerry had almost forgotten the feel of it. Gerry came to life. With one hand under Alan's shoulders and another under his hips, he lifted him as though he were an empty shell, while Kemp and Lieber drew out the dust-caked blankets and hammock and spread first a cane mat over the settle and then a blanket and, on top of that, a sheet. The touch of Alan's dry, crackling skin seemed to Gerry to be burning his hands. "It is as though there were fire in him," he said to Lieber.

Lieber looked at his patient with an all-seeing eye. He paused before covering him up. "That's it," he said. "There's fire in him — the worst kind — and he's been playing with it, just tickling it with stale quinine." His eye ran rapidly over the thin body. "I said the dose I gave him would probably kill him but I've changed my mind. I'm betting the other way, now I really look at him. There's no flesh on him,

but he does n't look like a skeleton. Why? Because of the sinews and bones of him — they're perfect. Look at the way the sinews hold his neck and the way the neck carries the sinews. Look at the flat bulge of his ribs and the breadth of his shoulders over the hips. That means heart and lungs and vitals. That man's been a fighter and, unless I'm a bigger fool than I was yesterday, he's a fighter yet."

"Cover him up, for God's sake," said Gerry.

Lieber dropped the sheet and went off to the kitchen. Gerry and Kemp covered the stripped body and tucked many blankets over it. Lieber came back and took off half the blankets. "Must n't tire him with weight," he explained. "If he's going to sweat, he'll sweat all right. Malaria — malignant fever — is the tireddest disease in the world. When they get too tired to breathe, that's the end." He took hold of Alan's wrist. "To feel his pulse, you'd say he was dead now."

"'Bout time we was startin'," remarked Kemp with his eyes toward the declining sun.

Gerry's first impulse was to say he would stay but he suddenly remembered Margarita. How far away from life she seemed! Alan and Margarita could not crowd into one day or even into one world — it was against the order of things. But facts do not stand on the order of their coming, they simply come and against the protest of man's will they present his fate; against the cry of the troubled and displaced soul they voice the eternal *j'y suis, j'y reste* of inanimate things. One cannot go around a fact. One must either break

one's head against it or swallow it and let it take its course through the mental gorge.

Gerry longed to stay by Alan's side and through his returning consciousness, as through a magnifying glass, gaze upon the world he had forsworn — the heritage he had abandoned. But the fact of Margarita and her boy suddenly declared itself — demanded digestion — and Gerry turned his back on Alan. He mounted and with the silent Kemp reversed the drive they had made together months before.

Lieber did not go with them. When he had seen them off, he busied himself giving orders for the tidying up of the veranda, the feeding of Alan's convoy, beast and man, and the preparation of a room for the self-invited guest. From the pile of dusty pillows a servant was picking up, fell a board. Lieber glanced down at it. Words were cut roughly but clearly into its surface. They spoke to him. They held his eyes. He stooped laboriously and picked up the board. He took it into his private room, propped it up against some books on the table and sat before it with his face dropped in his hands. To his closed eyes the words seemed no longer carved in wood. Against the inward darkness of his brain they shone out in points of light. He could not shut them out. "*Qui de nous n'a pas eu sa terre promise, son jour d'extase, et sa fin en exil?*"

At sundown Lieber came out to his patient. He had him moved, settle and all, into a room whose windows opened upon the veranda. Lieber sat beside him and nursed him through the long hot night. To the deftness of his hand had been added tenderness and into his

face a new determination had come — a resolve to win Alan's battle for him whatever the odds.

Gerry did not sleep that night. He lay on the little extra bed he had made upon his son's arrival and, propping himself on his elbow, gazed around him. The moon shone through great cracks in the warped shutters and filled the vast room with a glow that, as his eyes dilated, became a revealing light. In one corner was an iron wash-stand with its vessels of coarse enameled metal, a recent purchase. In another corner stood a grotesque clothes-rack. It looked like a young pine with irregular branches and top lopped off. On the stubs or pegs, hung his clothes and Margarita's and, on the lowest peg of all, the Lilliputian garments of the Man. The floor was bare and rolling, for the boards, rough-hewn from hard-wood giants of the forest, had warped steadily through many years. In its center stood the great rustic bed that Gerry had made from the twisted limbs of trees and Bonifacio had plaited with thongs. By raising himself to the full length of his arm Gerry could see Margarita lying uncovered on the coarse, yellowish homespun. On her bare brown arm lay the black head of her son.

Gerry shuddered at the nearness — the familiarity — of everything. The seams of elementary life stood out brutally. For the first time he saw them. From the touch of the coarse homespun that covered him, his mind went back to the feel of Lieber's fine linen and from that it poised on Alan and then flew back to Alix — Alix who, seen through the years, became doubly ethereal and flower-like. Where was Alix? What had

Alan done with her? He must ask him. That, at least, he must know. But before he could ask he must decide about Margarita and steel himself to his purpose. He thought of the long still days at Fazenda Flores before Alan had come to Lieber's — the struggle and the reward that had been his — and the firmness in him, the steadfastness that had led Alan to name him The Rock, rose up in defense of Margarita and her son.

Gerry was up early. As he was saddling True Blue, Margarita came on to the veranda. "Where art thou going?" she asked.

Gerry looked up. He was a little pale from the wakeful night and there were slight shadows under his eyes. "I am going to Lieber's. There is a sick man there — he is dying and I must help. He is my fellow-countryman."

Margarita's eyes searched his face. Her bosom rose and fell rapidly. "Do not go," she said, and Gerry started at the passion in her voice.

He looked at her and smiled. "I must see this man before he dies," he said, half to himself.

"Ah," said Margarita, beating with her little brown fist on the veranda pillar, "I know. I know. It is not death that calls thee. Why should one turn from things that live to fondle death? It is the stranger thou wouldst see."

Gerry dropped the reins of his horse and, hurrying up the steps, took Margarita in his arms. "And why not, my beloved? Why does thy heart beat so? It is

not a woman I go to see, but a man. Shall I not talk with a man that is at death's door?"

"Let him but die," pleaded Margarita; "let him but die and thou shalt go and bury him. See, the day is beautiful. There is a cloud. Perhaps it will rain. Come, my Gereë, let us go down to the river and swim. We will take the Man. He shall sit on the bank and the river will play with his bare toes. He will laugh."

Gerry smiled but shook his head. "To-morrow, my beloved, to-morrow we shall play with the Man and the river."

Margarita's arms fell to her sides in pathetic surrender. She watched Gerry mount and ride slowly up the slope to the bridge where Kemp awaited him. Then she went back to the veranda steps, sat down and wept with her face hidden in her hands. She did not know why she wept but she knew she wept for things that were going to be. The Man came toddling out to her, fell on her shoulders, dragged her hands from her face and crowed with delight. It was an old game, played often before, except that this time when the game was over his little fists were wet.

CHAPTER XXXI

ALAN was struggling back from coma. He was passing through what Lieber termed to himself a stage of reflex cerebral phenomena. He muttered, he talked, but the words were rendered unintelligible by his thick dry tongue. Lieber listened. When his patient could speak clearly, he would give him broth even if he had to rouse him. But before Alan could speak clearly, he awoke. Lieber found his sunken eyes, the pupils appearing almost concave, fixed on him with a seeing gaze. It was like resurrection. A spirit had come down upon the body. Eye to eye, mouth to mouth, heart to heart, it had given sight, breath, life.

The eyes closed. Lieber hurried away. From the kitchen he brought a bowl of broth. It was steaming and filled the room with an odor of rich essence. It was in itself a concentration of life. Lieber held Alan's unwilling head on his left arm and with a small spoon carried drops of the broth to his dry lips. At first Alan scarcely swallowed them. They stayed in his mouth or trickled unaided down his throat. But gradually his tongue softened. He could feel the contraction of his throat giving way to the oils of the broth. He tried to reach a weak hand towards the bowl. Lieber smiled and fed him with a larger spoon. The bowl was emptied. Alan sank back into the pillows.

His eyes wandered wistfully over the bare walls, the high tiling of the strange room. "I would have, great gods! but one short hour of native air — let me but die at home," he murmured and Lieber heard.

The words clutched at his own heart but he answered cheerfully, "You shall, my boy, you shall die at home if you like, but you're going to have years to think it over. Sleep, that's the word. And sleep it is," he added to himself as Alan's eyes closed and his chest began to rise and fall in healthy breathing. Lieber held his wrist. The pulse was taking on strength.

Alan was still sleeping when Gerry arrived. Lieber looked up, surprised. "You've come all the way back from Fazenda Flores?"

Gerry nodded. "How is he? Has he come to, yet?"

"Yes," said Lieber in a low, modulated tone. "He came to, all right. But the fight's not over yet. Fever goes and comes, you know. If another paroxysm seizes him, he'll not have the strength to pull through. It's a question of hours now."

"You've been up all night," said Gerry. "Go and lie down for a while. I'll call you if anything happens."

Lieber rose reluctantly. "Don't fail to call me," he said. "I'll leave my door open."

Gerry sat down in a chair beside the settle. He had not known how tired he was himself. Soon he drowsed. His head fell forward on his chest. Sleep came to him and then a great trouble came to his sleep.

He roused himself from a nightmare and, suddenly wide awake, found Alan's eyes fixed on his face.

"You," murmured Alan.

Gerry did not answer. His face became a mask. It seemed to him that only Alan's eyes were alive, and to Alan that Gerry had projected his spirit to his bedside to watch him die.

Alan tried to smile in defiance. "Can't you speak?" he whispered hoarsely.

Gerry leaned forward. The question he had to ask was stronger than he. It forced its way through his lips. "Alan, what did you do with her? Tell me that and I'll go away."

A troubled look came into Alan's thin face. He frowned. "Do with her? Do with whom?"

"Alan," said Gerry, his suppressed voice trembling, "you know. With Alix."

"Oh," said Alan, still struggling on the verge of consciousness. "I remember. I did nothing with her. She would n't go with me."

"Alan," groaned Gerry. "I saw you. I saw you and Alix *on the train*."

The frown was gone from Alan's forehead. He felt sleep coming back to him and he was glad. "Yes," he said, "she was on the train with me. I remember. She jumped off. A baggageman — caught her." He dropped off to sleep again.

Lieber stepped catlike across the floor. He caught Gerry by one ear and with the other hand over his mouth, led him out of the room. Gerry went tamely. When they were on the veranda Lieber looked at him.

"So," he said, his blue eyes blazing, "you only want to kill him."

"No," said Gerry, dazed, "not now."

"Mr. Lansing," said Lieber, "you get out of here. We'll settle this business some other time."

Gerry's lip trembled. "You're right, Lieber," he said. "You're right, only you don't know it all. That chap in there — we were boys together. He ran away with my wife. That's why —" Gerry suddenly stopped. Alix had not run away. She had jumped off the train. Where was she then? What had she done through the years he had been away? Why had she jumped off the train? He struck his hand to his head and stumbled off the veranda.

Lieber's anger died in him, but he turned and went back to Alan.

Two hours later he came out again to find Gerry crouched on the veranda. The spirit had gone out of him but he turned on Lieber with a determination in his tired eyes. "You told me to get out and I have n't. There are things I've got to know. I'll wait."

"I spoke in haste, Mr. Lansing," said Lieber. "I want you should forgive me. You are all in, too. Come with me."

He led him into his own room, made him lie down, and closed the shutters. Gerry threw himself across the bed, arms outstretched, face down. Lieber slipped out and noiselessly shut the door. Gerry lay exhausted. He could not think any more. A great weight lay on his brain. The ten minutes' doze in the chair at Alan's bedside had not been rest, but a nightmare. Presently

he fell into sleep, a deep sleep that was all unconsciousness.

It was almost night when he awoke and with the awakening, the weight settled back on his brain, only now he had the strength to think in spite of it. He got up and went out in search of Lieber. Lieber heard him and came out into the hall. Gerry nodded towards Alan's room. "It's all right, Mr. Lansing. He must have a solid mind. Your talk did n't excite him — did n't even disturb his sleep. He's on the road up — weak, a baby, but he's started life again. He's asked for you twice. Seems to have something he's got to get off his chest to you. You'd better go in."

Gerry sat down once more beside Alan. The questions he must ask crowded to his lips but he forced them back. He tested his strength with resolutions and held them. It was his way of reassuring himself. He wanted to feel his firmness rising in him to meet the struggle he felt must come when Alan spoke.

Alan knew he was there. He saw him through half-closed eyes but, more than that, he felt him. His brows puckered in a frown. It was still hard to use words. "Gerry, last night I wanted to tell you more only I could n't. I had to sleep. Alix did n't go with me. She only came to the train. When I kissed her she woke up and found she was n't — carnal after all. She went back home. You did n't turn up. You never turned up. They traced you to a river, an empty canoe — pajamas — you know." He stopped and sighed as though his task were over.

The veins on Gerry's forehead stood out in knots.

His chin rested on his clenched hands, his elbows on his knees. "Alan," he said, "where is Alix now? What has she done?"

Alan opened his eyes and looked at him. "She is waiting. She has always waited for you to come back. She would not believe you were dead, because of the boy."

"The boy!" groaned Gerry. "What boy?"

"Yours," said Alan. "He is a great boy. There is a new Alix since he came. She is as far from me and what she was as the stars. She is a steady star. But it's all right now. You'll go back to her."

"I can't," whispered Gerry hoarsely, more to himself than to Alan. "I've got a wife here. I've got a child here. To me he is my first-born."

Alan's eyes opened, this time in wonder. A twisted smile came to his lips. "You!" he said. "You!" and then the smile changed to a faint disgust. He turned his head on the pillow away from Gerry and slept.

The next morning found Gerry still at Lieber's. He knew he must go back to Fazenda Flores in the end but just now his soul was too raw. He hung around waiting for Alan to wake up. There was only one way to soothe the pain of his wound and that was to add vinegar to it. He wanted to hear more and tell more. It seemed a terrible affront that Alan — Alan of all people — should sit in judgment over him. Alan awoke at last to a ravenous appetite and a desire for the open. They moved him, settle and all, out upon

the veranda. "What a murderous day!" he said, his eyes turning, blinded from the blaze of sun, to rest in the shady nooks of the veranda.

Outside, the heavenly bowl of blue was virgin of clouds. It stretched and domed in a sphered eternity of emptiness. Through its depressing void the sun swam slowly, pitilessly, as though it were loth to mark the passing minutes. The whole earth baked. Strong trees wilted and turned up the wrong sides of their leaves on the sea of heat like dying fish turning up their white bellies at the last gasp. Not a breath of air stirred. Heat rose from the ground in an unbroken, visible wave. "My God," said Alan, gazing with wistful, far-seeing eyes beyond the familiar, repellent scene, "'a homeward fever parches up my tongue.'" There was such an agony of longing in the words that Gerry was frightened. He looked questioningly at Lieber.

"No," said Lieber, "he's not dying. He *was* dying, but he's changed his mind. He's going to go home instead."

"I believe he's right, Gerry," said Alan with a faint smile. "But I did n't change my mind. He did it for me. He's in line for a life-saving medal. Lieber's all right." He stopped, tired out.

Lieber began to talk to Gerry. "How's the water in the ditch, Mr. Lansing?"

"Mighty low," said Gerry. He spoke almost absent-mindedly. For the first time in months the ditch was far from his thoughts.

"It's hard luck," said Lieber. "The river's never

been so low before — not in the memory of man. We do not hear the falls any more. The river is asleep. Do you want me to send my men down again?"

"It's no use," said Gerry. "I don't dare deepen the ditch any more. It's way below the normal level now."

Alan stirred. "What's that about a ditch?"

In unhurried phrases and a low voice Lieber told him the history of Fazenda Flores since Gerry's advent and of the great part the ditch had played in bringing resurrection to the abandoned plantation and life to the neighboring stock.

Alan cast a curious glance at Gerry. "Dangerous business," he said, "fooling with the normal level in flood country."

Lieber nodded and went on. He told his tale well. He had seen more than Gerry could have put into words. Gerry listened for a while but he soon wearied. What had all that to do with him now? He wandered off and started to saddle True Blue. He must get away from Alan. Alan was drawing him but he was bound in chains. He must remember that. Then, too, what Alan had said about fooling with the normal level worried him. He must go back and station a guard at the great sluice-gate.

A sudden puff of air, then a breeze, then a gale, swept down on Lieber's from the southwest. The wind was hot, a furnace blast from the torrid wilderness. It carried with it swirls of dust, light dry sticks, and finally, small pebbles that hurtled along the ground. Gerry and his horse sought shelter by the house.

Herders came running out from their quarters and gathered in front of the veranda. The wind suddenly turned cold, dropped and ceased. The dust settled. The sun blazed as before. There was not a cloud in the sky. The herders all looked at Lieber. They did not talk. They were waiting.

Lieber shrugged his shoulders. "Somewhere," he said with a wave of his hand to the southwest, "there has been rain and hail and that sort of thing. Temperature fell and drove the hot air off the desert." He told the men but they did not go away. They stood around, their eyes sweeping the horizon to the southwest. At last one of them grunted. His eyes were fixed on a distant pillar of dust. It came towards them. Lieber used his field-glasses. Without taking them from his eyes he spoke. "It's a man, riding. Looks like he's riding for life. Something is up. He's riding to kill his horse."

As the man approached, a dull rumbling filled the ears of the watchers. So gradual was its crescendo that they did not notice it. The rider spurred and beat his horse to a final effort. They could see he was shouting. He drew nearer and they heard him, "Flood! Flood!" Then they noticed the rumbling. It became a roar. Far away on the horizon rose a white, advancing mist. The rider rolled off his staggering horse. "The flood," he gasped. "Never before has there been such a flood."

Before the words were out of his mouth there was a frenzied rattle of hoofs and Gerry on True Blue tore off in a mad gallop down the trail towards Fazenda

Flores. Almost at his heels followed the first mounted of the herders, riding all they knew to cut across to Piranhas ahead of the wall of water.

Lieber's eyes followed Gerry's flight. Then he turned them on Alan. "That hollow down there," he said, "will be turned into a rushing river in half an hour — perhaps less. We're just safe here, and that's all. You see Mr. Lansing? He's the spot furthest down the trail. I'm thinking we'll never see him again."

A faint flush came into Alan's cheeks. It was a flush of pride — pride in Gerry. Gerry had not hesitated. He had not ridden off like a laggard. Even now they could see that he was riding for life — riding with all his might for the lives that shackled him.

CHAPTER XXXII

GERRY had never ridden a horse to death before. When True Blue first staggered he put spurs to him and laid on his quirt right and left.

The roar of the river was so loud that he could not tell if he had really beaten the flood or not, though he could see just before him the long, snaky ridge of the main ditch banks. He must get on.

But True Blue only came to a staggering stop under the quirt. With his forefeet he still marked time as though with them he would drag his heavy body and master one step nearer home. From his loins back he was paralyzed.

With a last desperate effort he straddled his fore legs but he could not brace himself against the backward sag of dead weight. Gerry felt him sinking beneath him and suddenly found himself standing over his prostrate horse. Of True Blue, his forefeet outstretched, his head and breast still held high, there was left only a great spirit chained to a fallen and dying body.

A cry escaped Gerry's lips — a cry of horror at what he had done. Then he remembered why he had done it and ran not for the sluice-gate but for the bridge. As he reached it the roar became deafening. There was a splintering, crackling sound that, measured by

the great commotion, seemed like the tinkle of a tiny bell. But there was something in the sound that called to his brain. He cast a glance over his shoulder. The monster beams of his sluice-gate, hurled, splintered into the air, were still hanging against the blue sky. Under them surged an angry white wall of racing water. Even as he started to run down the long slope to the house Gerry thought with a great relief that if the gate had been closed it would have gone even so, like match-wood.

Below him Fazenda Flores lay peaceful, still, under the blazing sun. The cotton was a little wilted but high and strong, the cane stunted but alive. Only in the pasture bottoms the stock had gathered in frightened clumps. Their instinct had told them that danger hovered near. Suddenly from the quiet house burst Margarita carrying her son on one arm. She had seen Gerry from a window. While the others watched the rising river, and now this terrifying torrent bursting down upon them from above, she had slipped out to run to him.

The house at Fazenda Flores stood on a domed mound. Behind the mound was a slight hollow before the steady rise to the bridge began. Gerry caught sight of Margarita as she ran down towards this hollow. Terrified, he cast a glance at the descending flood and his eye measured its pace against hers. "Go back!" he shouted with all the strength of his lungs and waved his arms. It was as though he had not spoken. Through the din and roar of the flood the sound of the words scarcely reached his own ears.

At the very bottom of the hollow Margarita felt that she was stepping in water. She took her eyes from Gerry who she thought was beckoning to her and looked down. A hurrying rivulet whose swift flow carried it before the churning crest of the flood, tugged at her ankles. She looked up toward the thundering wall of oncoming water and knew that she was lost.

She stopped and fixed her eyes on Gerry who was plunging down the slope in a mad effort to reach her. She called to him but she knew he could not hear her. With arms stretched to their highest she held up the Man. The Man was not frightened. His black eyes were fixed on his running father. Margarita could feel him gurgling with joy in the new game. Then suddenly he cried out. It was a wail of fright. The wail was cut short. Broken in two, it rang terribly in her ears as she went down.

The water had felled Margarita and the Man. Gerry saw them flung down against the ground and then high on the crest of the wave. They became suddenly a twirling, sodden mass, inanimate save for the fling of a loose limb into clearer view against the blue sky or the uncoiling of long black hair on the seething water.

Gerry reached the torrent. Margarita and the Man had already been whirled far towards the great river. He plunged into the flood. The water was thick with earth, sticks, up-rooted plants and debris of every sort. Conflicting, swirling currents tugged at heavy stones, rolled them along and sometimes even tossed one to the surface.

Gerry's struggling body was hurled hither and thither. A stray current shot him to the surface but, before he could take breath, other currents sucked him down and dragged him along the rough surface of the crumbling soil. He felt as though he were being torn limb from limb.

Then suddenly he was cast into an eddy that in comparison with the maelstrom, was almost peaceful. For an instant he felt like one who awakes from a terrible dream, but with the sigh that trembled to his lips came realization.

From head to toe he was battered and bruised. His cotton clothes were in tatters. His chest heaved in great, spasmodic gasps. Breath whistled through his wracked lungs. His eyes protruded. His head ached till it seemed on the verge of bursting. But to his mind pierced a thought sharper than pain—the thought of Margarita and the Man. With clenched teeth he struck out for the current.

Far, far away rose a dusty line of mist. It marked the head of the flood—the meeting of water with the accumulated dust of rainless months. Gerry recognized the meaning of that line. Somewhere there in the turmoil of the first rush of the mad flood were Margarita and the Man—what was left of them. The distance dismayed him, but he swam on. Then he felt the fast approaching end of endurance. A sob choked him.

It was only minutes till his arms refused to answer to his will. They moved so weakly that more than once his gasping mouth sank below the water. He

swallowed great gulps of the turgid flood. Then an up-rooted tree brushed by him. He clutched its branches.

When all else in the world has passed from a man's brain there remains the life instinct — the will to fight for the last minute of his allotted being. The life instinct was all that still lived in Gerry. It urged him to a last effort. He dragged his body upon the tree where the branches forked from the main trunk. Utterly exhausted he sank into their embrace. They held him as though in a cradle.

The rush of the waters began to slacken. They stretched out over the valley and crept up its sides. They did not flow so much now as rise. The valley became a moving sea. On its flowing surface beasts, fowls and reptiles struggled, mad-eyed, for life. Here and there a bloated carcass, brought down from far up the river, blundered blindly through the living and brought screams of terror from the swimming horses, and gasping lows from the struggling cattle.

From the middle of the sea rose the old plantation house still high and dry on its mound. It seemed very tiny — a toy house on a lonely islet.

A great, open, white umbrella lined with green sailed gaily along. It caught in the branches of Gerry's tree. Up-rooted cotton bushes floated by, and cane, snapped off, sometimes torn up in whole hills, banked up against the tree and formed a vast, unstable island toward which swam the deluded stock.

From the mouth of the cleft in the river gorge issued a thundering cataract. It had burst through the

walls of the ditch and even unseated a section of the rocky crag against which the sluice-gate had been buttressed. The ditch was gone. It could never be again, for the water was tearing the channel of the cleft deeper and deeper. The turbid flood devoured the silt of the valley, accumulated since man was, and carried it, seething, out towards the river. The valley would be left naked, stripped of the source of life.

Gerry's tree had crawled away from the main current. In a vast eddy it approached the mound whereon squatted the old plantation house. Dona Maria stood at the edge of the waters. Her two hands were clenched and held above her gray head. Thin wisps of hair hung about her face. Her face was distorted. She was cursing Gerry, cursing the day of his birth, the day of his coming, the day he had opened his ditch. She swept her arms over the terrible scene and called down the curse of all the ruin and death on his head. But Gerry was beyond hearing. In all the world there was none to hear the old woman. She stood alone; about her the silent waters, above her the blazing blue sky.

The tree shot out of the eddy. The current, the main current from the cleft, caught it squarely and swept it away. It suddenly shook its long trail of riff-raff and turning and turning, more and more swiftly, swam out on to the churning bosom of the great river.

The valley had disappeared. Squatting on the very level of the far-flung waters, the old house still stood. The bright sun struck a glint of light from its white walls and gave rich colors to its moss-grown tiles. The

roof was crowded with fowl and a strange medley of heavy flying birds, glad of a perch on which to rest. Dona Maria went into the house. She closed the great board shutters. The house looked as if it had closed its eyes in a last renunciation.

Gerry's tree floated down the river. It swung slowly along near the north shore. Just below it were houses. They were perched on the cliff. Below them were more houses and under these the tiled roofs of still other houses just topped the flood. The houses were what was left of Piranhas.

From the shore canoes in search of loot began to shoot out on to the quietening waters. One of them happened upon Gerry's tree and then upon Gerry. Gerry's eyes opened and then closed again. He scarcely felt the arms that lifted him. They carried him to the old inn, the miserable little inn he had left behind on that glorious morning of so long ago.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A SHARP attack of fever followed Gerry's exposure and immersion. The old woman of the inn knew no medicaments, but she knew fever. She piled blankets on Gerry and let him sweat it out. On the third day nature, assisted by his magnificent physique, finally routed the attack. Gerry began to feel hungry. He called the old woman and ordered food. For once food in Piranhas was plentiful. Mandioc, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, as well as fowl, marooned on trees and wreckage, had stocked the town as it had never been stocked before. Gerry ate heartily.

Then he began to think. The nightmare was all true. From his window he looked out on the slowly receding waters of the greatest flood the San Francisco had ever seen. Fazenda Flores was no more. With it three years of his life had been wiped out. Outwardly he was back where he had begun. But inwardly he was eons away from the starting-point of three years ago. Alix had waited for him but he had not waited for her. He had given himself to Margarita and to Margarita's son. Margarita and the Man were dead but the fact of his gift of himself remained. What had he but the shell, the husk of himself, to take back to Alix?

He called the old woman. He asked her if she re-

membered him. She peered at him. "No, master," she said, "I do not remember you. You are like the foreigner who was drowned, but he is dead."

Gerry shook his head. "Not dead," he said, "only disappeared."

"You are not he," said the old woman. "He could not talk words that one could understand."

Gerry nodded gravely. He felt as though words could never make him smile again. "I have learned," he said. "Now tell me what became of the things I left here?" He went through the list.

The old woman checked off each item and then shrugged her shoulders. She led him to a little dark room whose only light came from the interstices of the tiled roof. As his pupils expanded he began to make out one after another of the bags that had made up his traveling kit.

"There is a letter," she said, and went off to fetch it. Gerry dragged the bags out into the light. Their locks were all sealed with the seal of the American Consulate at Pernambuco. He started knocking off the brittle wax. The old woman came back with the letter and handed it to him. He tore it open. It was a note from the consul saying that by order of Gerry's wife his things had been sealed and left at the inn, and telling him where to find the keys. The room, he learned from the old woman had been paid for regularly, at first by the month, then by the year. She felt no resentment at his return, only resignation. "You are the only guest I've had since you went away," she said quaintly and with a sigh.

"Fear nothing," said Gerry kindly. "You have been faithful. You may consider the room engaged by me for the next ten years."

He carried his bags into the room overlooking the river and then lay down. He was too tired after the fever to open them. He knew that the opening of those dust-covered bags with their rusted metal fittings was going to be another ordeal.

The next day Gerry sat before his unpacked bags. He had turned out all their contents. On the bed, the floor, the table and the chairs was piled such an array of linen and shoes and suits of various cut and weight as he had once deemed the minimum with which a man could decently travel. Now they seemed to him wasteful and futile. The clothes did not carry his mind back as he had expected. The starch in the linen had gone yellow. He had always hated yellow collars. The suits struck him as belonging to some one else — all except one. One sturdy suit of tweed had a cut that was different from the others. Of all the clothes it alone seemed to have a personal note — the note he had expected to find in the bags and had shrunk from.

Then he remembered. This suit had been made by his own tailor. He had worn it during a flying visit to Red Hill. He had had it on the day he left New York. He had worn it that morning in Alix' room. Red Hill came back to him, Alix stood before him. Through the suit he saw her room, the shimmering blue of her dressing-gown, her crown of hair and her thin fingers busy with it. He felt again the nip of the

clear air as it had streamed in through the open window.

How calm Alix had been under his arraignment. How curious had been her eyes as he raved at her. Would she have been calm and curious like that if she had really loved Alan? He remembered the shameful things he had said before he could lash her into an answering temper. He heard again the scratching of a pen as he had heard it that morning, standing in the hall outside her door. How blind he had been! She had been writing to Alan — writing to him in the white heat of anger. He had driven her to it with his shameful words. He had left her no other answer. And after all, she had waited! Gerry put his hands to his forehead. It was wet with cold sweat. He got up and went out.

The worst of the flood was over. Gerry engaged a search party. All day long they sought for Margarita and her child. Towards night they found them, the little boy tight clasped in his mother's arms. Gerry laid them tenderly in the canoe and in silence the party crawled back up the river to Piranhas. No one looked curiously at the burden they carried up through the main street. Eyes were tired of the familiar sight. The hour of weeping, the allotted tears, were long since spent. They buried them that night. Gerry went back to his room. He could not eat. He sat for a long time looking out on the starry river. Then unconsciously he picked up the old tweed suit and hung it carefully on a chair. The rest of his scattered things he swept unceremoniously upon the floor and threw

himself full length on the bed. He was exhausted and slept.

He was up early the next morning. He made the old woman bring water and bathed in his room. "It is wise," she said. "For many days there will be poison in the river." Gerry did not answer. He closed the door and went through his ablutions and toilet with great care. His beard he had always kept close-clipped. Now he shaved it off. The tan of his face looked like a mask above the fresh white of his newly shaved jowls and chin. He picked out the best of his linen and dressed. Lastly, he put on the old tweed suit. It fell naturally to the lines of his body all except the waistband of the trousers. He drew the back strap as close as it would go. Still the trousers were a little loose at the waist. At first he was puzzled, then he understood. He looked at himself in the broken glass with a gorgeous but sadly tarnished frame that hung on the wall. His shoulders seemed to carry the coat better than before. He could hear Jones & Jones say, "A splendid fit, sir. You can't pick it up anywhere."

Gerry turned from the glass with a sigh. He was restless. The heavy tweeds seemed to bind his limbs and chest, but he would not take them off. He sat at the window and watched the little stern-wheeler splash up to the bank. Luckily for her, she had been three days late in starting up the river; else that trip would have been her last. Gerry tried to exert himself to the trouble of packing and getting on board but he felt listless. Why should he hurry back? Alix had

waited, was waiting, but not for him. He had not waited for her. He must go back and tell her, of course, but what then?

A cavalcade came down the street. At its head was carried a litter and on the litter lay Alan. He had refused to ride in a hammock again. Behind him rode Lieber and Kemp. Gerry drew back from the window and watched them make their way down to the little stern-wheeler. She had brought little freight, there was none for her to take away. By three o'clock she gave a long shriek of warning and half an hour later she warped out into the river and chugged away down stream. At the last moment, Gerry had sent down to Alan a note addressed to Alix.

Lieber turned from watching the boat out of sight. It was bearing Alan away with Kemp installed as nurse as far as the coast. Lieber stumped heavily up the street, leading his horse. From his window Gerry called to him. Lieber took the reins from his arm and handed them to a boy. He climbed to Gerry's room and sat down on the bed. Gerry had never seen him look so tired.

"So," said Lieber, "you escaped."

Gerry nodded gravely. Lieber looked at him with dull eyes. "We passed Fazenda Flores. The house still stands. It's on a little island." Gerry nodded again. Lieber shrugged a shoulder impatiently. "Why are n't you up there?"

Gerry braced himself and told him. In a dispassionate tone he told him the history of those terrible moments of destruction and death. "I am not there,"

he finished, "because there is nothing left. Three years—all my life here—have been wiped out. Margarita—she knew from the beginning. From the beginning she hated the ditch. I have been a curse. I have brought ruin." Gerry stared before him. His face was white and drawn.

Lieber shook his head judicially. "No, it would have been the same except that without you there would have been nothing to sweep away. Margarita would still be alive. There would have been no boy." He paused. "Somehow," he went on, "I don't believe Margarita would have chosen to have things different. She got her *jour d'extase* and died before it was over. I—I don't think we need be sorry for her. Why did n't you go away on the boat?"

"I don't know," said Gerry. "I tried to, but I could n't. I just buried her and the boy last night. I could n't run away like that as though it were all over. Of course, I know it is all over but when one falls an endless depth in sleep and suddenly wakes in a cold sweat it takes time for the mind to catch its balance. It's that way with me. I've fallen from a height. I've waked to a cold sweat. I must take time to get the balance of life and get it right. You can't hurry over these transitions, because somehow it would n't be decent."

Lieber nodded. "You don't feel like riding back with me?" he asked hesitatingly.

Gerry shook his head. "No," he said. "I can't do that. I'm just going to sit here and wait for a while and then I'm going home. There's something

I've got to straighten out. After that, I don't know. But there's something I wish you'd do for me, Lieber, and that is to look after old Dona Maria and those two old darkies at Fazenda Flores. They won't last long, any of them, and I don't want them to lack for anything. I'll square up with you."

Lieber nodded listlessly. "I'll look out for them."

The next morning early, Gerry saw him off. There was a wistful look in the old man's eyes as from the top of the cliff he turned and gazed down the river. "Lieber," said Gerry, "you can count on me to do what I can for you when I get home. Do you understand?"

Lieber flushed. Their eyes met. He took Gerry's outstretched hand and gripped it hard. Then he rode away without a word.

Lieber threw his horse into a rapid rack that was faster than a gallop. It was a killing pace but he knew the mettle of his mount. Late in the afternoon he came to the confines of his ranch. The broad-eaved house in the distance looked very still and deserted. Beyond it loomed the solitary joa tree. Something had happened to the joa tree during the two days he had been away. It had become a beacon. He remembered the giant Bougainvillea vine that covered the tree. The Bougainvillea had bloomed into a tower of mauve flame. It stood out in daring contrast to somber desert and brown-tiled roofs. Its single, defiant and blaring note struck an answering chord in Lieber's heart. He took courage of that brave burst of color, so jarring in a garden, but in the desert, a

thing of glory. Lieber passed into the loneliness of his deserted house with a firm step.

Gerry spent many days at Piranhas as he had planned, in thought. He went over his life in a painstaking retrospection. His mind lingered long on the last three years, their fullness, their even upward trend. Could a man live three such years and lose them? In a ghastly half hour the flood had wiped out the tangible results of three years of labor. But what about the intangible? He had sinned against Alix and against her faith but had he sinned against himself? He felt infinitely older than the first Gerry Lansing but would he change this thinking age for his unthinking youth? What if he had learned three years ago that Alix had saved herself and his name? Would it have meant loss or gain to him to-day? Something within him cried, "Loss! Loss!" but he dared not take courage from the inward cry. He could not know, he reasoned, until he had seen Alix.

Until he had seen Alix. That thought haunted him. It drove him. He must see Alix. He must start by the very next boat but when the next boat came some gnawing fear of unreadiness held him back. His fear was greater than the compelling thought of Alix.

Twice, three times, the little stern-wheeler drove her nose into the mud bank at Piranhas, called her hoarse warning and departed. From some distant cliff Gerry saw her come and go or, miles away, walking himself tired across the desert, heard her throaty siren cry and did not heed it.

CHAPTER XXXIV

IT was with some misgivings that Kemp left Alan at the coast. Alan was still very weak. Kemp stood, more incongruous than ever, against the rail of the little coaster bound for Pernambuco and eyed Alan whom he had made comfortable in a camp bed on the deck.

"It seems to me, Mr. Wayne," he said, "that there mought be business waitin' fer me at Pernambuco thet I do'n know nothin' about. I've got a hunch I'd best go along of you and see."

Alan smiled. "I know what your hunch is, Kemp, and it's a wrong one. I'm all right. Weak, but I'll make it. Don't worry."

Kemp was standing in angles. His hands were thrust in his trouser-pockets but even so his elbows were crooked. One foot was raised on a rail. He was coatless as usual. His unbuttoned vest stuck out behind. His Stetson hat was pulled well down over his eyes. His eyes had'taken on the far-away and slightly luminous look that always came into them when he was about to speak from the heart.

"Mr. Wayne," he said, "I've tol' you some things about Lieber an' you've seen some more. You know how he stands. Lieber's livin' in Hell, like the rich greaser in the Bible with his tongue stuck out beggin'

for one drop of water, only Lieber hain't got his tongue stuck out — he's bitin' it."

Kemp paused and Alan nodded.

"I was thinkin'," Kemp continued, "thet perhaps you 'n Mr. Lansing with yo' folks he'pin' mought chuck him that drop o' water when you get back to Heaven, meanin' Noo Yawk." Kemp brought his eyes slowly around and rested them on Alan.

"Kemp," said Alan, "don't you worry. If J. Y. Wayne & Co. have n't gone to smash or the world otherwise come to an end you can be sure Lieber will get his water in a full bucket."

Kemp nodded and with a "S'long and good luck," disappeared down the gangway.

At Pernambuco Alan found an accumulation of mail awaiting him and a liner bound for home. The liner was too big to get into the little harbor behind the reef. She rode the swell a mile out from shore.

Alan lost no time in making his transfer. From the tender he was winched up to the deck in a passenger basket. As he left the wicker coop he smiled at himself in disgust. Ten Percent Wayne had often jumped for a gangway from the top of a flying sea; never before had he gone on board as cargo. But the smile suddenly left his face. He reeled and put out one hand toward a rail. Somebody caught his arm and led him to a long chair. He sank into it and shivered.

It was a girl that had helped him. As soon as she saw he was not going to faint she left him, to come back presently with the doctor and a room steward. They took charge of him.

Day after day Alan lay in his cabin, listless, before he thought of his batch of letters. They were still in the pocket of his coat. He asked the steward to hand them to him, looked through them, picked out one and laid the rest aside. The one he picked out was Clem's.

With her own peculiar wisdom Clem had written not about him or herself, but about Red Hill. Alan read and then dropped the letter to his lap. His hands fell clenched at his sides. His eyes, grown large, stared out down the long vista of the mind. Walls faded away and the sounds of a great ship at sea were suddenly dumb. To his ears came instead the caroling of birds in evening song after rain, to his eyes a vision of Red Hill dripping light from its myriad leaves and to his heart the protecting, brooding shelter of Maple House — of home.

It cleanses a man's soul to have been at death's door. Sickness, more than love, leads a man up. Alan was feeling cleansed — like a little child — so that it seemed a quite natural thing that the girl who had taken charge of him on his arrival on board should knock at his door and then walk in. She drew out a camp-stool and sat down beside him.

She was very small and very young, not in years but with what Alan termed to himself acquired youth. Her near-sighted eyes peered out through big glasses. They seemed to see only when they made a special effort and yet they seemed to give out light.

"You are better?" she asked and smiled.

Alan caught his breath at that smile. "Yes," he

said, "I am much better to-day. I have had a letter from home."

"You must get up now and come up on deck," said the girl. "I'll wait for you outside." Her voice had a peculiar modulation. It attracted and soothed the ear.

Alan frowned and then smiled. "All right," he said, "wait for me." He dressed laboriously. His hands seemed weighted.

On deck she had his chair ready for him beside her own. She tucked his rug about him and then sat down. "Don't talk ever, unless you want to," she said. "Silent people are best."

"Why?" asked Alan.

"They are springs. Their souls bubble."

"And the people that chatter?" asked Alan.

"They are geysers," said the girl and smiled.

Alan was entertained — almost amused. "What do you do when a geyser spouts?" he asked.

"What do *you* do?" replied the girl. "I run."

"I'm afraid I have n't run — always," said Alan.

"I generally try to clap a tin hat on them."

"You must be strong to do that. I'm not very strong."

Alan glanced over her frail body. "What are you?" he asked.

"I'm a missionary. At least, I *was* a missionary. I've had to give it up. One needs so much to be a missionary."

"I never thought of it that way," said Alan. "I always thought that it was the people that were unfit

for almost anything else that turned to missionarying as a last resort."

"Oh, *no!*" said the girl, sitting up very straight in her chair and fixing her eyes on his face. "How wrong you are! Missionarying, as you call it, is just another name for giving, and how can one give a great deal unless one has a great deal to give — strength and youth and vitality?"

"And you have given all?" asked Alan.

The girl's eyes filled.

"No, you have n't given all," went on Alan quickly. "You are still giving. I must not borrow your last mite. But — your voice is like a nurse's hand."

When Alan went to bed he could not sleep. For a while the little missionary girl held his thoughts. He was filled with wonder, not at her, but at himself. For once in his life he had not been flippant before grave things.

From the girl his thoughts turned to Alix. He could have cabled to her about Gerry from Pernambuco but he had not done so. The note that he was carrying for Gerry was light — only a half sheet probably. The lightness of it told Alan that the things Gerry had to say to his wife could not be put on paper. Alan had almost cabled. Now he was glad he had not done so. "Alix," he said to himself, "is n't waiting, she's trusting. A cable would have lengthened waiting by a month."

Then, without volition, his mind wandered from Alix and raced ahead to the goal of his journey. What was the goal of his journey? Whither was he bound? He

reached for Clem's letter and held it in folded hands. He had no need to read it again. The words were nothing; the picture was all. It stretched before his mind, a living canvass.

Once when Alan was wandering with an Englishman in the hills above Granada, a faint odor had brought them to a sudden halt. It was the Englishman who made the surprising discovery first. "Blackberries, by Jove!" he had exclaimed. "Good old blackberries." And then they two had stood together, yet half a world apart, and stared long at the berry-laden bush. What vision of a tangled, high-walled garden burst upon the Englishman Alan never knew but to himself had come a memory of East Mountain in autumn, so clear, so poignant, that it had brought his throbbing heart into his throat.

It was so now with Clem's letter. The words were but a hurried daub but they touched his eyes with a magic wand. The daub became a scene, a picture, a world — his world.

Red Hill was spread out before him, a texture where the threads and colors of life were blended into a carpet soft but enduring. Men walked and little children played on it. Alan closed his eyes and sighed. What had he been doing with life? Making sacking? Sacking was commercial. It paid in cash. It was the national industry. But what could one do with sacking on Red Hill?

Then, almost suddenly, the full spirit of Clem's letter seized him. One did not take gifts to Red Hill. To every one of its children Red Hill was the source of

all gifts — the source of life. On that thought he slept.

When he was back once more in his rooms, before Swithson had had time to open a bag, Alan re-directed Gerry's note to Alix to Red Hill and sent Swithson out to post it. He did not try to temper the shock of the note with a covering letter. He was too weak and tired. Besides, he felt that the note carried its own antidote to joy.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE next morning a message came by hand to Alan's rooms. Alix had come to town and wished to see him at once. Would he please come around? He replied that he was too ill. Half an hour later Swithson answered a ring at the door and Alix slipped quickly past him into Alan's sitting-room. There was a flush of anger in her cheeks but Alan was pleased to see no trace of tears in her eyes. A woman's crying always touched him on the raw and seldom awakened his pity.

At sight of him Alix forgot her concern for herself. "Why, Alan!" she cried, "what is the matter?"

Alan laughed. There was a pleasant note in his laugh she had never heard before. "I'm all right, Alix. Don't make any mistake. I'm a resurrection in the bud. Doing fine. I don't have to ask how you are. You're well. You're looking just as well as a little slip like you can ever look. Sit down, do."

Alix' thoughts went back to herself and immediately the flame burned again in her cheeks. She pulled Gerry's crumpled note from her glove and tossed it open on the table before Alan. He read the two or three lines in which Gerry told her he would arrive shortly. The brief note was intentionally colorless. "Well?" he asked.

Alix turned flashing eyes on him. "Well? Is that all you have to say? Alan, it is *not* well. I've come here because you must tell me — somebody must tell me — *now* — all the things that that note hides behind its wonderfully blank, weazened, little, hypocritical face."

Alan's eyes gleamed with amusement at the rippling words. Alix was certainly well. Then suddenly she collapsed into a chair. "Three years!" she gasped. Her hands went up to hold her head and she began to cry in a way Alan had never heard a woman cry before. The gasping sobs racked his nerves. He felt as though the sobs were tearing their way up from his own breast. He gripped the arms of the chair in which he sat. His body telephoned to his brain that he was going to faint and at such astounding news Ten Percent Wayne woke up and took charge. "Alix!" the word snapped out like the crack of a whip. "You stop crying or I'll slap you, and when I slap I slap hard."

Alix choked, swallowed and looked at him, outraged and unbelieving. Alan's eyes were blazing. "You listen to me," he commanded, "listen to every word I say. You've gone through a lot in three years but just fasten your mind on to this: so has Gerry. That note is colorless because Gerry made it colorless. It does n't tell anything, because Gerry is n't a coward and because there are things he must tell you face to face to get your answer clear in his own mind. I'm making you curious with every word. All right, be curious. But you can be sure of one thing; if Gerry had wanted me to tell you his story he'd have asked me to, but he did n't. He did n't even ask me not to. He was stand-

ing in deep waters but he had his head and shoulders out. He was n't asking for my, or anybody else's hand to help him up the bank. He did n't ask me not to meddle because he knew I was man enough to see where he stood without words. He trusted me." Alan's voice trailed off weakly. He closed his eyes.

"But, Alan," said Alix, "I must know *something*. Is he well? Is he —"

Alan held up his hand. "Just one thing and then I'm going to sleep. I never thought the old Rock would ever loom so big."

Alix watched him doze off. She felt strangely comforted by the crumb he had tossed her. She went back in her mind to a dinner of long ago when she had defended Gerry's placid weight against Alan. She sat on for half an hour busy with varying thoughts. She looked curiously around Alan's sitting-room. How strange that she should be here and yet how natural. How safe she felt. She wondered if it was all because of the defenses she had raised up in herself or whether any woman would feel safe with the new and weakened Alan. She slipped out without waking him and sent a cable to Pernambuco. By night she had an answer. Gerry had not yet sailed!

Days passed. She went out only for exercise. Her mind was busy with wondering. The Judge called regularly. He had put off going to Red Hill. He wanted Alix to feel that a friend was at hand and, besides, he had Alan on his hands. Alan was worrying him in a new way. Something had gone out of him. Sometimes he seemed to the Judge a mere shell — a

blown egg, robbed of the seed of life. The Judge talked of him often to Alix but she could not fasten her mind on Alan. "Take him to the Hill," was her listless advice.

"I've tried," said the Judge, "and he says he's not ready — not strong enough. I told him that's what he ought to go for — to get strong — and he said a funny thing. 'There's a kind of strength we must generate or borrow. I did n't borrow, so now I'm generating. It takes time.' And then he dropped off to sleep. Before, he used to run you through with his tongue when he wanted to stop a conversation. Now he just goes to sleep. It's just as effective and almost as original."

One afternoon the Judge came in with a smile on his face. "Alan is better," he announced.

"Is n't he better every day?" asked Alix.

"Not like this," said the Judge. "You know Fleureur? Of course you don't. You would n't. Can't imagine how he ever got into the club, but he did. Well, it's a long time since Mr. Fleureur has been asked to cut in at bridge at the club or anywhere else. Yesterday he came in and saw Alan for the first time since his return. 'Hallo, Wayne,' he said, 'back again and doing the heavy swell as ever only not quite so heavy inside the clothes now, eh?' Alan is getting touchy over being a weakling. That's a good sign too, by the way. He looked sideways out of his sleepy eyes at Fleureur and you bet everybody listened." The Judge paused at thus forgetting himself; then he went on. "Alan said, 'Do clothes matter such a lot? Somehow it seems to me it does n't make any difference how much a man waxes

his mustache as long as he does n't wax his finger nails.' "

Alix' face lit up. "Oh, that is Alan." The Judge's eyes twinkled. "Yes," he said, "and then Alan went off to sleep like a shot and Fleureur remembered an engagement. The whole club's cheered up. The club did n't know what was the matter with itself but it knows now. It was missing Alan after he had come back."

Alan had written to Mrs. J. Y. that he was planning to motor from town to Red Hill. Clem, as Mrs. J. Y.'s deputy, had answered his letter, promising him a warm and long welcome at Maple House. She gave him a way-bill. "It's the simplest way-bill in the world," she wrote, "out of town and along the Sound till you come to The River, then up the valley till the bald top of East Mountain signals you from the left. Climb the mountain and from there the old church will lead you home."

"The old church will lead you home," Alan repeated to himself as he let his relaxed body lounge across the tonneau and trusted to cushions and springs to take up the bumps. His thoughts raced ahead of him to Red Hill. In memory he plodded over dusty roads and through mossy lanes, swam, fished and loafed, wept and laughed. He was going back to the cradle of all his emotions.

The wind and the motion of the car made him sleepy. He dozed. He awoke to see East Mountain looming in the distance. Steadily the car drew into its lee. Alan sighted a climbing road and called directions to the

driver. From the bare top of the mountain he made out the old church, a white speck on a far-away hill. He stood up and traced the course they were to follow. He was filled with a strange excitement. "Never mind the bumps — open her up," he ordered and sat down and closed his eyes.

The car shot down into the valley, rattled across one bridge and then another, sped along the Low Road, over-shot the embowered mouth of Long Lane, protested with the grinding of changing gears, backed, turned, and then lurched forward again and up. Long Lane was as cool as memory and as balmy with the twining odors of birch and sassafras and laurel as childhood's recollection. Alan drew a long, full breath and then the car ran out on to the top of Red Hill, swerved to the right and turned in under the low hanging limbs of the maples.

It was early afternoon. The old homestead was very still. As the car drew up at the curb a girl rose from a deep chair on the veranda and stepped forward. Alan caught his breath and stared. He felt himself a little boy. Nance, a mere rosebud of a girl, stood before him and smiled at his bewildered face. "You're Uncle Alan, aren't you?" The soft voice sustained illusion but the words brought him to himself — made him feel suddenly older by a generation. Then he smiled back at her and chaffed, "You *have* been busy since I saw you last. Have I the honor of presenting myself to Miss Sterling?"

"The same," replied the girl, laughing, "and your niece."

"Come. That's enough. Don't rub it in. Besides,

you're only niece by courtesy. By the family tree we're cousins."

"All right. I'll be a cousin to you if you like it better," remarked Nance, Junior, demurely.

Alan had sprung out. He caught her hands and kissed her. Her fresh mouth brushed his cheek.

"Yes, I like it better," he said. "It's some fun kissing a cousin."

Nance, Junior, snatched away her hands and dashed into the house. "Mother, Clem, he's here. Unc—Cousin Alan's come."

From upstairs came a sullen but feeble roar, as though a bull had bellowed and only echo had come forth. From a hammock under the trees, J. Y. tumbled his stiffening limbs and with a quick shake of his broad shoulders strode across the lawn. There was a patter of women's feet. Clem burst out of the house, caught both of Alan's hands and shook them. Her lips opened but she said nothing. Her eyes and her heart were full of welcome. Alan felt them speaking for her. Then came Mrs. J. Y. and J. Y. and Nance, the mother of four. There arose a babel of hearty greetings but through them all could be heard the rumble of the echo-like bellowing.

"Ssh!" said Alan, holding up his hand. "What's that noise?"

Clem laughed. "It's the Captain," she said. "Listen."

In the silence the rumbling became vociferation. "Bring him up here. Bring him up here. Bring him up here, dammit."

"You'd better go quickly," remarked Nance, Junior. "He's begun to swear and Mother does n't like us to hear it."

Alan hurried into the house and up to the Captain's room. The grown-ups followed but stopped below and waited. Nance, Junior, remained to direct the chauffeur to the barn.

"Excuse me, miss," said that worthy, "but Mr. Wayne has n't had a bite to eat since seven this morning. You might not think to ask him, you see, so I thought I'd tell you."

"I see," replied the young lady and added with ready wit and a smile, "just find the kitchen and tell the cook."

Alan found the Captain propped on many pillows. His bulging eyes had the same old glare, his close-cropped hair still made an effort, though feeble, to insurgency, but his corpulence was gone. He had collapsed at last and was bedridden after his severe stroke. "Huh!" was his greeting.

Alan sat down beside the bed. "How do you do, sir?"

"Do? I do all right. It's the liquor in this country that's gone off, sir. Corked whisky. That's all that's left. I'll show you, Alan." And he roared, after a preliminary puff, "Two whiskies."

Mrs. Wayne appeared. "Now, Captain," she said softly. "What's this. Two at a time? You're getting better."

The Captain subsided. "One for Alan," he grunted. The drinks came. Alan welcomed his. He was

tired and faint after the long journey. The Captain gazed on his own glass defiantly but ordered the maid to set it on the table at his side. Alan waited long for him to take it up and then he saw that the Captain had fallen asleep. Alan sipped his drink. The Captain was right, it was flavorless. But Alan remembered that he had thrown away his last cigarette for the same reason. He sighed.

CHAPTER XXXVI

IN spite of the Judge Alix was feeling very lonely, abandoned, unloved. She sat on the little veranda at the back of the town house and day-dreamed. Across her knee lay the morning paper. A word caught her eye. *Elenic*. Half unconsciously she read: "Among the arrivals by the *Elenic* . . . Hon. Percy Collingeford."

Collingeford! She started to her feet and then with what seemed a perceptible click her mind repeated, "*Elenic*." She sat down again. The hand that held the paper was trembling. She sat for a long time looking at her hand. The telephone bell rang but she did not hear it. Old John came and stood beside her.

"Mr. Collingeford telephones to know if you are in town."

A frightened gleam showed in Alix' eyes. It passed and a flame of color came into her pale cheeks. "Yes," she said, "I am at home. Tell him I will see him at any time to-day."

Collingeford lost no time. When he arrived Alix was still sitting on the veranda. She received him there. He came upon her with a rush — like a fresh breeze. "What luck!" he cried. "Really in town on a hot summer's day? Which is it? Frocks or the dentist?"

Alix rose and held out her hand. A faint smile came to her face, lingered a moment and passed. "I am glad you have come," she said and then paused. Her eyes wavered. Was she glad he had come?

Collingeford caught her mood. "Just what do you mean by that?" he asked gravely.

Alix' eyes came back to his face. "I — I don't know," she stammered.

They sat down. Collingeford dropped his hat and stick and leaned forward. A dull color burned in his cheeks. "Alix," he said, "has — has anything happened?"

"No," said Alix, "not what you mean. Gerry is alive. He has written. He says he is coming back — sometime."

Collingeford sprang to his feet, his eyes flashing.

"*Sometime!* Did he really write that? *Sometime?*"

There was a petulant look about Alix' mouth that belonged to an Alix of long ago. She tried to shake it off with her mood. "No," she said dully, after a pause. "He did n't write just that but it amounts to the same thing. He wrote but he has not come."

Collingeford paced up and down the little veranda, his arms crossed and one hand pulling nervously at his mustache. He came to a stop before Alix and stood looking down at her, his eyes eager but questioning. "Well?" he said.

Alix made a little gesture of despair with her two hands. "I — I don't know," she repeated. Then, quite quietly, she began to cry.

Collingeford caught her hands and drew her to her feet. He put his arms around her. She laid her head against his shoulder and sobbed. Collingeford's heart was beating furiously. His arms trembled. He longed to strain her to him but he only held her firmly and patted her back. Some instinct told him that this was not the moment of possession.

When Alix could talk he knew that his instinct was true. "Oh," she said, "what a little beast I am! Unfair to you, unfair to myself."

She disengaged herself and sat down. With a tiny square of cambric she dabbed at her eyes.

"Here," said Collingeford, and held out a big fresh handkerchief.

Alix took it and used it solemnly. Then its bulk struck a sudden note of humor. She laughed and Collingeford smiled. As she gave back the handkerchief she pressed Collingeford's hand. "I have been a little beast."

"No," said Collingeford gravely, "you have been unspeakably lovable."

"It would have been that if I loved you. But I don't. That's why I've been a beast. To make you think —"

Collingeford interrupted her. "You made me think nothing. Somehow I knew. I knew it was just loneliness running over from a full heart."

Alix nodded. "How wonderful of you to understand," she said. "Lonely. Yes. I've been terribly lonely. Never before so lonely."

"You shall not be lonely any more," said Collinge-

ford. "Every day I'll come and talk to you, take you out — anything. I'm yours."

Alix shook her head from side to side. Her eyes refused him.

"Alix," cried Collingeford, hurt, "don't you want me even for a friend?"

"Don't mistake what I'm going to say, will you?" said Alix.

Collingeford shook his head.

"Gerry is coming back," went on Alix, "but — I don't know what he is bringing back. Perhaps it is something he can't share with me; perhaps it is something I do not want. When you went away I had only faith; now I have only doubt. Such a big doubt. That's why I said to you, 'I don't know.' And while I don't know I will not have you even for a friend." Alix flushed and fixed her eyes on Collingeford's face. "Do you understand?"

Collingeford's eyes were glowing. "Yes," he said, "I think I do. You mean that perhaps — later on — you will send for me."

"Perhaps — only perhaps," whispered Alix.

Collingeford picked up his hat and stick. He took Alix's hand and held it long. She would not look up. He stooped and kissed her fingers.

"I shall be waiting," he said.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE peripatetic, pathogenic agent of malarial fevers possesses the prime attribute of a bad penny — it comes back. Alan had often fatted himself to receive the prodigal and he was not now at a loss to account for the sudden lassitude, the deadened palate and the truant sense of smell that had come upon him. He turned to Mrs. J. Y. "I'm afraid I'll have to lie down. I hate to be a nuisance but I've got a touch of fever." To the initiated "a touch of fever" means anything from a slight indisposition to a knock-out blow delivered below the belt. It is the sole phrase of confession recognized by the malarial cult. Happily for Alan, the expression on this occasion was no euphemism. He was suffering from a touch of fever and nothing more, brought on by too continued exertion. He was shown to his room, his old room with its old-fashioned, many-paned windows, its enormous closet and, under recent coatings of white enamel paint, the many marks with which in boyhood he and his forebears had branded the ancient wood-work.

A flutter and then a sigh of disappointment went through Maple House at Alan's immediate eclipse. The children foresaw an order for silence or a veto on the afternoon's excursion to the lake. J. Y. became restless and wandered noiselessly about from room to

room. Clem sat in the great window and dreamed and listened for Alan's bell. She would not go to the lake. The children were solemnly grave and then giggling by fits and starts.

The Eltons had come back from abroad. From Elm House Cousin Frances Elton, commonly known as Tom, short for tom-boy, came racing across the lawn waving towel and bathing clothes and in a high treble giving a creditable imitation of an Indian war-whoop. At Tom's cry the children stampeded on to the veranda with sibilant cries of, "*Sshsh!*" Mrs. J. Y. looked at Nance and Nance smiled resignedly. They put away their work, ordered the wagonette and the colts — colts no longer, alas, save in name — and departed with a wagon-load of suppressed youth. From Long Lane floated back peals of young laughter, breaking bounds as the overhanging trees hid the Hill from view.

Clem sat on the vast window-seat and toyed with a book. J. Y. came and dropped down beside her. "Well, Clem, he's come back."

Clem nodded. "Are you sure he does n't want anything, Uncle John? He has n't had a thing to eat since seven o'clock this morning."

Alan's bell tinkled. Clem started to her feet and then sat down again. "You'd better go." But when J. Y. strode off she followed.

"Why is the house so quiet? Is it on account of the Captain?" asked Alan.

"Bless you, no. The Captain sleeps for a week at a time. The children have gone over to the lake."

"I just wanted to tell you that I like their noises

— they're new. There's nothing really the matter with me except that I've got to take things in turn, and lying still and sweating comes first. After that, perhaps to-morrow, I'm going to eat. The penultimate act on my list is a cigarette and the ultimate is to get up in the old belfry and yell." He turned over and sank his head into the pillows.

"All right, my boy," said J. Y., smiling. "There's only Clem and myself here and we'll go and try to make noises like the children." He came out of the door in time to catch sight of Clem's skirt as it whisked around the corner of the hall. He followed and found her already seated at the piano. Her fingers wandered over the keys and then her soft, full voice broke out in one old song after another. She was happy because she felt that singing she was with Alan.

Alan stirred in his bed and listened. He determined that to-morrow he must be well. Robbed of this afternoon, he was being robbed of half of life. He cursed the fever and then, as he felt how near Clem's voice brought her to him, he blessed it.

At night when all the rest of the household had gone to bed, J. Y. softly opened Alan's door and looked in. Alan was awake and nodded. J. Y. came in and pottered about the room. He rolled a bit of paper into an ampler shade and further veiled the night lamp. The lines in J. Y.'s rugged face were softened to lines of sweetness. He asked if there were nothing he could do and then turned to leave the room. With his hand on the door, he paused and smiled down on Alan. "My boy, you have been far, far away."

"Far away," replied Alan drowsily, "but I have come back."

The bracing air of Red Hill and a long night's sleep enabled Alan to keep his word with himself. He was up and out on the day following his arrival but he still felt delightfully lazy and pitifully weak. Clem took charge of him. First she tried to settle him in a hammock with many pillows but Alan shrank from the hammock. They spread rugs instead in a nook under the trees and Alan stretched himself out amid a riot of many colored cushions while Clem sat close by in a low rocking chair and talked and read and talked.

Talking or reading, Clem was a source of unvarying delight to Alan. Was it possible that one could live twenty years in an old world, rub elbows with life for twenty years, and remain so fresh, so untainted? His own life rose up before him and mocked at him. Was it possible that one could live thirty years in this same world and be so old? He shrugged a shoulder petulantly. He would not think—he refused to think while he was so weak.

When Clem talked, it was like a child dreaming aloud: when she was silent, one felt the presence of womanhood, wise with the unconscious accumulations of generations and unabashed. When Clem talked, Alan was at ease but when she was silent, he was moved—troubled. A scarred man may play with a child and no harm to either. He can detach himself from his past as from the child and at a safe moral distance turn to watch its unconscious gambols. But with a woman it is different. Womanhood is a force; its mission to embrace, to sacri-

fice. It is unreasoning. Like fundamental man it demands a god and worships the god that comes to its need. Alan felt this force hovering in Clem's silences and was troubled.

The subjectivity of a sick man disarms woman; she knows she is safe and abandons her weapons of attack and defense as long as the invalid is taken up with the state of his insides. Clem was unaffected, even tender, with Alan as long as he was weak but as his strength returned to him she withdrew, one by one and gently, the intimate attentions a woman accords to babes and the related helpless. But there was nothing absolute in her withdrawal; it was more a temptation than a denial, born of woman's innate desire to be pursued. While Alan was merely convalescent it contained a suppressed gaiety, half demure, half mischievous, but when his full strength came back and he failed to pursue, the gaiety arrested itself, turned into a questioning wistfulness and ended in the secret shame and blushes of the repulsed and undesired.

Clem saw Alan build a barrier against her, a barrier of little things each insignificant in itself but each lending and borrowing the strength of accumulation. Alan spent hours with the old Captain, walked, rode and talked with J. Y. and the Judge. Between them, J. Y. and the Judge had fixed up Lieber's affair and Alan had cabled.

In the midst of women Alan seemed to be able to forget woman — to forget her intentionally. There was nothing pointed in his avoidance. He kept his distance from Alix and Nance and Jane Elton in the same

measure as from Clem. There was thus none of the single avoidance of the shy swain who lavishes attentions on all but her whom he would most dearly sue. Clem, least vain of beautiful women, sat long hours before her glass. Never before had the charms it revealed been questioned, never had she been forced to close in the ranks and call up the reserves and now she felt at a loss, unaccustomed to the ready moves of the coquette. Clem dropped her face in her hands and cried.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

CLEM'S was not the only troubled heart on the Hill. At The Firs Mrs. Lansing moved restlessly from room to room and stopped often to read and re-read a crumpled note — Gerry's note to Alix.

Alix was still in town. Mrs. Lansing had written to her and then wired. Alix replied telling her not to come, that she wished to be alone. For hours at a time Mrs. Lansing replaced the nurse at Gerry, Junior's, side. He helped her. She felt that he could help Alix.

She was almost glad when he developed some trifling ailment becoming to his years. She wired again and this time Alix came, frightened. Alix was like a wilted flower but she braced herself until Gerry, Junior, recovered into his healthy self. Then she drooped once more and refused to be comforted.

If it had not been for Alan, Alix's trouble would have cast a gloom over the rest of Red Hill, but it was known that Alan had sought out Mrs. Lansing and told her that not even he knew just how Gerry's battle stood, but that he did know that there was a battle and that Gerry would surely come back as soon as he had fought his way clear.

So the Hill in general went almost untroubled on its way trying to forget that it was still awaiting a fulfilment and even Alix began to glean a little comfort

from the thought that hope was but deferred. Her heart was sick, her faith weak, but hope still lived. She clung through the long days to Gerry, Junior, and waited.

At Maple House the beating of young hearts amounted to a din but it was suddenly stilled by a day of drenching rain. After the very tame excitement of seeing J. Y. and the Judge off for the city, gloom settled in the faces of the children. Cousin Tom, in rubber boots and coat, came down the road from Elm House to find company for misery. The barn was requisitioned and became the scene of a subdued frolic but it afforded meager diversion. The hay was not in yet, the empty lofts were dreary. In the afternoon Mrs. J. Y. was besieged to surrender the house and finally did. Alan had gone to his room and closed the door. The Captain was plunged in invulnerable slumber.

Somebody rapped at Alan's door and he called, "Come in." The door opened and revealed Nance, Junior. Behind her was a giggling, whispering throng. The spirit of fun danced in Nance's eyes. Her cheeks were flushed and her golden head was in disarray. "Oh, Cousin Alan," she cried, "Grandma's given us leave for Hide and Seek and we're all going to play except Mother and Grandma and the Captain. Please come too, Cousin Alan."

From behind her came a modified echo, "Pleath do, Couthin Alan." Alan smiled and laid down his book. "All right," he laughed.

Maple House was a rambling abode that had grown and spread like the giant maples that sheltered it. In

what age the Captain had demanded a wing or some by-gone Nance a nursery for her children, was chronicled in the annals of the house itself, to be revealed only to the searching, architectural eye. The key to the rambling structure lay in the thick-walled dining-room, the parlor, one bedroom and the kitchen.

From the nucleus of these four rooms Maple House had grown, imposed and superimposed, until it overflowed the arbitrary bourne of kitchens and front doors and like some mounded vine rippled off on all sides, in vast living-room, sunny nurseries and a broken fringe of broad verandas. There were nooks that were satisfied and held back from further encroachment and there were outstanding corners that jutted boldly out over the sloping lawns and threatened a further raid.

Inside, the paths of daily life ran clearly enough through the maze but on their flanks hung many a somber den for ambush or retreat. Cavernous closets, shadowy corners, lumbered attics, and half-forgotten interstices of discarded space opened dark gorges to the intrepid, and threatened the nervous and unwary with what they might bring forth. The gods of childhood's games themselves could not have builded a better scene for that most palpitating of sports, Hide and Seek on a rainy day.

Alan soon entered into the spirit of the game. He found himself recollecting things about Maple House that he had more than half forgotten; strange by-ways under the roof; a vacant chamber, turned into a trunk room because one by one it had been robbed of its

windows; and lastly the Little Attic that had been, as it were, left behind a wall.

Through this dreamland of a hundred children flitted the brood of the day, marshaled rather breathlessly by Clem and Alan. Anxious whispers, the scurrying of lightly shod feet, then a sudden silence but for the flute-like counting of some juvenile It, were followed by sudden screams and a wild race for the goal. Maple House had never countenanced the effete and diluted sport of I Spy; it was all for Hide and Seek where you had to hold your man when found or beat him to the goal.

Great was the excitement when the Littlest It of all caught Cousin Alan by a tackle around the ankle that spoke a volume of promise for the Littlest It's academic career and brought a glow of achievement to his perspiring face. Alan was placed at the newel at the foot of the great staircase and duly admonished in treble voices not to look. The treble voices rained excited instructions on him, carried away by youth's confidence in its ability to teach its grandmother how to suck eggs. Alan started to count slowly in sonorous tones. With a last shriek and the patter of many feet the trebles faded away into silence.

Alan crept stealthily up the stairs. Out of the corner of his eye he caught sight of the twitching jumpers of the Littlest who was too fat to quite fit the retreat he had chosen. But Alan did not quite see until it was too late. The Littlest exploded the vast breath he had been holding in and plunged headlong down the stairs. As he rolled by the newel he stuck out a sturdy arm and

held fast. He shouted a pean of victory and once more palpitating silence fell on the house.

Alan wondered if he could find the way to the Little Attic. He hurried along the twisted halls, up a tiny flight of steps, turned, dived through a low, narrow tunnel and threw open the long-forgotten door. It was as though he had suddenly opened a portal on his own childhood. A great pensioned rocking chair held the middle of the floor as within his ken it always had held it. Ancient garments hung from pegs on the walls and from hooks on the rafters. A box or two and more disabled furniture littered the floor. The whole was faintly lit up by the light from a little dormer window. Nothing stirred. Alan drew a long breath. He was not disappointed. No one had thought to come here but himself.

Suddenly a bit of the pendent wardrobe was flung aside and an apparition dashed for the door. Alan sprang in front of it, threw his arms around it, held it tight. It struggled, laughed, ceased to struggle, and looked up as Alan looked down. Clem's face was very near to his. Her body, still throbbing with excitement, was in his arms. Alan felt such a rioting surge in his blood as he had never known before. He wanted to kiss Clem. He felt that he must kiss her, that there was not strength enough left in him to do anything else. Then his eyes met hers and he forgot himself and remembered Clem. His soul cried, "Sacrilege," and he dropped his arms from about her and stepped back.

Clem stood before him, dazed. She was in her stocking feet. In each hand she held a little slipper. Her

eyes were big and full of the soft reproach of the mortally wounded. Alan felt ashamed and looked away. He had to break the silence. "Well, you're caught," he said lamely.

Clem dropped one slipper, threw up her hand and brushed the disordered hair from her forehead. "Yes, I'm caught," she said and her lip trembled on the words.

CHAPTER XXXIX

ONE day in midsummer Alan, to his disgust, was summoned peremptorily by McDale & McDale. Half an hour's consultation was all they required and Alan was pleased to find as he left their offices that he still had plenty of time to catch the early train back to Red Hill. There were only two afternoon trains for that difficult goal.

As he strolled up the Avenue he was arrested by the sight of a tall figure standing on the curb watching the swirl of the traffic. The figure was dressed in a heavy whipcord suit and a Stetson hat, uncompromisingly domed in the very form in which it had been blocked by the makers. A street gamin yelled, "Hi! fellers, look what's got away from Buffalo Bill!" Kemp gazed sad-eyed but unmoved over his drooping mustaches, doubtless mourning the passing of the shooting iron and the consequent unanswerable affronts of a fostered civilization.

Alan elbowed his way across the stream of pedestrians and clutched him by the arm. Kemp whirled around as if to meet attack but smiled when he saw Alan's face. "I was jest calculatin' on roundin' you up," he drawled.

"Where did you come from? Where are you off

to?" cried Alan and without waiting for an answer he hailed a cab, hustled Kemp into it, and ordered it to his club. He forgot his early train.

In the club lobby Kemp surrendered his hat reluctantly to the ready attendant and followed Alan across soft carpets to a quiet corner where two enormous chairs seemed to be making confidences to each other. One could imagine them aggrieved at being interrupted and sat upon.

"Well, Kemp," said Alan, "I'm glad to see you. What's yours?"

"Rye 'nd a chaser," said Kemp.

"Same for me, waiter," ordered Alan. "Now, Kemp, tell me all about it."

"I jest blowed in from Lieber's, Mr. Wayne, and I'm headed West."

"How's Lieber and where's Gerry? Did Lieber get my cable?"

Kemp looked sadly out through the window. "Lieber's dead."

"Dead? Lieber dead?"

Kemp nodded. "I found him with everything fixed for kickin' the bucket. He knew what was the matter but he did n't tell me what it was. Said it had been comin' on him for some while an' thet he wa'n't no he'p for it. But he got your cable, Mr. Wayne, and he wanted I should tell you that what you done wa'n't wasted. He said there wa'n't nothin' thet could he'p him through the way that cable did. He said it was the passpo't he'd been waitin' for an' thet you wa'n't to think it come too late because he reckoned he was

goin' to use it. Said it kinder cleared his trail for him. Them was all the things he said I should tell you."

Kemp stopped talking and downed his drink. Alan sat silent and thoughtful. Lieber was gone and made a gap in his life that he never knew had been filled. He wanted to know more. He turned to Kemp. "Well?"

"You remember the joa tree at Lieber's, Mr. Wayne? One o' the lonesomest trees on earth, I reckon, except when the Booganviller comes out an' then it's a happy mountain o' red pu'ple that kind o' lights up the hull desert."

Alan nodded.

"Well, then, you remember the big boulder of gray-wacke under the tree. That's Lieber's headstone. He had a mason up from the coast and he made us carry him out under the tree to watch the man work. He give him a model cut into a boa'd to copy f'm. I'm some reader but them words beat me every time. I corralled 'em on a bit o' paper though, an' here they be."

Kemp drew a slip of paper from the same old wallet that housed "The Purple City." He handed it to Alan. "Wish you'd put me on," he said. "All I know is it ain't American an' it ain't Mex."

The words on the slip looked as if they had been printed by a child with painstaking care. Alan stared as he saw them. "*Qui de nous n'a pas eu sa terre promise, son jour d'extase, et sa fin en exil?*" he read slowly to himself and then, with his eyes far away, translated for Kemp, "'Who of us has not had his

promised land, his day of ecstasy, and his end in exile? ”

Kemp nodded and held out his hand for the slip of paper. He put it back in his wallet and said, “ I suppose the feller thet wrote that was thinkin’ mostly of a man’s mind but when it comes to facts them words don’t fit Lieber. He got more exile than was comin’ to him; it et up the ecstasy an’ most of the promised land. But I don’ know. They’s lots of folks that needs to worry more’n Lieber over crossin’ the divide.”

They sat thoughtful for some time and then Alan remembered Red Hill. “ Where are you staying, Kemp? ”

“ Astor House.”

Alan looked at his watch. “ Come on,” he said. “ We’ve got to hustle. We’ve just got time to rush down and get your bag.”

“ What for? ” drawled Kemp.

“ I was bound for our place out in the country when I found you. We’ve got just forty minutes to catch the train. You’re coming with me.”

A wary look came into Kemp’s eyes. “ Your folks out there, Mr. Wayne? ” he asked.

“ Yes,” said Alan and then added, “ Kemp, do you take me for a man that would steer you up against a game you don’t hold cards in? ”

“ No,” said Kemp, “ I don’t,” and then found himself hatted and hurried into a taxi before he could further protest.

If Alan had any qualms about introducing Kemp to Red Hill they were soon allayed. Kemp was duly pre-

sented on the lawn at Maple House. To everything in petticoats he took off his hat and said "ma'am" but before the men he stood hatted and vouchsafed a short "Howdy!" accompanied by a handshake where it was invited.

Strange to Kemp must have seemed the group of which he found himself the center. At a tea-table under the biggest maple sat Mrs. J. Y. She called Kemp and motioned to a chair beside her. Kemp let his lanky frame down slowly on the fragile structure, took off his domed hat and laid it on the grass at his side. For an instant Mrs. J. Y. fixed her soft, myopic gaze on him and then looked away. Clem brought him a cup of tea and a biscuit. Kemp held the cup and saucer in the hollow of his hand and looked dubiously at their contents. "Would you like something else, Mr. Kemp?" asked Mrs. J. Y. softly. "Some other drink, I mean?"

Kemp's quick eye roved over the group. He saw that nobody was taking anything but tea and at the same time he noted gratefully that nobody was watching him. The Judge and J. Y. were talking to each other. Nance, Junior, and Cousin Tom were kneeling before Gerry, Junior, stolen for a short hour from Alix. That dwarf Moloch, arrayed in starchy white that stuck out like a ballet skirt above his sturdy fat legs, was gravely devouring a sacrifice of cake. Charlie Sterling lay full length on the ground while his brood, with shrill cries at his frequent eruptions, buried and reburied him with sofa pillows. Nance, Alan and Clem sipped tea and cheered on the children's efforts.

Kemp turned a twinkling eye on Mrs. J. Y. "I ain't sayin', ma'am, thet this mixture is my usual bev'rage but a man don't expect to have his usual handed down f'm a pulpit and likewise I see no call for folks turnin' their front lawns into a bar."

Kemp could feel a scene; his strange nature was moved at finding itself rubbing elbows with such a group and when Kemp was moved he always talked to hide his emotion. Mrs. J. Y.'s kindly eyes led him on, made him feel weirdly akin to these quiet, contented men and women and clean-frocked, rosy-cheeked children frolicking against the peaceful setting of shady trees, old lawns and the rambling house that staidly watched them like some motherly hen, wings out-spread, ever ready to brood and shelter.

Kemp's eyes left Mrs. J. Y.'s face and swept over the scene again. "Speakin' of bars," he went on in his soft drawl, "I don't think a missus ever has no call to handle drinks over an' above what goes in 'nd out of a milk-pail, which is n't drink in a manner o' speakin'. I can't rightly rec'llect that I ever seen a missus leanin' over either side of a bar in this country but I've strayed some from the home fence an' you may be su'prised, Mis' Wayne, to know thet they's lands where no one ain't never heered tell on a barman an' where barmaids is some commoner'n the milkin' brand."

"Yes?" said Mrs. J. Y. encouragingly.

"Sho' thing," replied Kemp; "I seen 'em. I won't forget the fust time because I was consid'able embar-rassed. I missed a steamer in Noo Yawk an' the firm was in a hurry so they sent me acrost to S'uthampton

an' while I was waitin' for the Brazil boat a feller I'd picked up on bo'd showed me around some. Well, it wa'n't long before he corralled me, quite willin', in a bar. I pulled off my hat and he says, 'Why d'you take off yo' hat?' and I says, 'Why don't you take off yourn? Don't you see they's a lady hea'?' Then he bust out laughin' and everybody that was nea' enough to hea' bust out laughin' an' the missus behind the bar laughed too though somehow it did n't sound as if she laughed because she could n't he'p it."

Kemp paused to blush over the memory. He did not notice that the Judge and J. Y. had drawn quietly nearer and that the rest of the group of grown-ups were intent on his words. "They's times," he continued, "when it's fittin' that a man should be without shootin' irons an' that was one of 'em. I can't rightly say what would have happened but guessin's easy. When he was through laughin' the feller that was showin' me around slapped me on the back and sez, 'That ain't no lady; it's a barmaid.' An' then they all laughed some mo' and the missus just kind o' laughed an' I mought 'a' been dreamin' but I thought I seen a look in her eyes thet says she was n't laughin' inside at all. Ever sence then I've been of opinion that a missus has no call to handle drinks an' I ce'tainly hope I'll never see one a-doin' of it under the home fence."

Kemp stayed at Maple House for a week. Before he left he was known throughout the country side. His lanky figure, drooping mustaches, domed hat and the way he held out the reins in front of him when he rode marked him from the start and when the youth of the

surrounding farms learned that he was a genuine cowboy that had ridden everything with four legs, they worshiped from afar and gloried in casual approaches.

Just before he went away Kemp took it upon himself to call on Alix. Alan led him to where she sat on the lawn among the trees at The Firs and left him. Alix looked up in wonder at his tall, lank form. Kemp held his hat in his hands and twisted it nervously.

"Mis' Lansing," he said, "I want you should let me say a few words to ye. I seen Mister Lansing 'bout five weeks ago."

Alix sprang to her feet, her pale cheeks aflame. "Yes?" she said. "When — when is he coming?" She sank down again and buried her face in her hands. The shame of putting that question to a stranger overwhelmed her.

Kemp sat down near her. "Sho, Mis' Lansing," he said, "don' you take it hard that you 're getting word of Mr. Lansing through me. Him an' me an' Lieber's ben 'most pardners."

Tenderness had crept into Kemp's drawl. Alix looked up. "Please," she said, "tell me all about him — all about these years."

Kemp hesitated before he spoke. "I ain't got the words ner the right to tell you all about them three years, Mis' Lansing, an' I can't tell you *all* about Mr. Lansing 'cause the biggest part o' some men don' meet the eye — it's inside on 'em. Thet's the way it is with Mr. Lansing. I c'n tell you, though, thet Mr. Lansing is well an' strong — strong enough to swing a steer by the tail.

"That's what I know. Now I'll tell ye some o' my thoughts. Mr. Lansing wan't born to be a maverick. Right now, I'm willin' to wager, he's headed fer home and the corral but he ain't comin' on the run — he's browsin' and chewin' his cud.

"When I seen him five weeks ago I thought on hog-tyin' him an' bringin' him along, 'cause Mr. Wayne had tol' me about you an' the two-year-old. But it come to me that a woman of sperit — one of *ourn* — would n't want her man should be *brought* in. She'd sooner he'd hog-tie *hisseff*."

Alix' head hung in thought. Her hands were clasped in her lap. As Kemp's last words sank in, the first smile of many days came to her lips.

Kemp rose and said good-by. With his hat pulled well over his brows and his hands in his pockets, he slouched toward the gate.

Alix jumped up and followed him. She laid her thin, light hand on his arm. "Thank you," she said, a little breathlessly. Kemp's deep-set eyes twinkled down on her. He held out his big, rough hand and Alix gripped it.

"Not good-by," she said.

CHAPTER XL

MAPLE HOUSE was riding the crest of a happy wave. In a body it advanced on the lake to picnic and supper by moonlight and in a body it returned; the little ones excited and wakeful, the grown-ups tired and reminiscent. Days followed that were filled with laziness and nights that rang with song. The cup of life was filled to the brim with little things. Sudden peals of unreasoning laughter, shrieks of children at play, a rumble of the piano followed by a rollicking college song, ready smiles on happy faces, broke like commas into the page of life, and turned monotony into living phrases. But beneath the gaiety ran the inevitable undertone. When joy paused to take breath it found Alan half aloof and Clem wistful behind her unvarying sweetness.

One evening Alan found himself alone with Nance. She had frankly cornered him, then as openly led him off down the road towards Elm House.

"Alan," she said, "you've turned into a great fool or a great coward. Which is it?"

Alan glanced at her. "What do you mean?" he stammered.

"You know what I mean. Clem. You're breaking her heart."

She felt Alan's arm stiffen. For a moment he was silent, then he said: "Don't worry, Nance. You're wrong, of course, but any way, no harm is going to come to Clem through me. I'm going away. I've meant to go for ever so long but somehow I could n't. Something seemed to hold me. I tried to think it was just the Hill and that it would be all right for me to stay on until the general break-up. But you have wakened me up and the proof that I'm not quite a coward yet is that I'm going to get up and run."

They came to the entrance to The Elms but Nance led him on down the road. "Run? Why are you going to run? Alan, don't you love her?"

A tremor went through Alan's body. "I don't know," he said, "whether I love her or not. If I ever loved any one before, then I don't love her, for the thing that has come over me is new — newer than anything that has ever happened to me. I would rather see her come down from her room in the morning than to have watched the birth of Aphrodite and yet I would rather see myself damned, once and for all, than touch the hem of her frock."

"Why?"

"Because it is not for me. Once Alix called her glorious. I don't know whether that was a bit of hyperbole on her part or not but to me she is just that. There is a glory about Clem — the glory of pure light. Do you think I dare to walk into it? Me, with my scarred life, my blemished soul and the moral rags that only half hide the two? *That* would be cowardly. I'm not coward enough for that."

Nance sighed. "I'm disappointed in you. I thought that if ever man lived that knew a little about women it must be you. I won't say any of the things I was going to say. Instead, I just tell you that you don't know women."

They walked back in silence. Nance went into the house but Alan said good-night and started thoughtfully down the road. His step quickened and walking rapidly, he passed over the moonlit brow of the hill and down, down into the shadows of the valley. Hard is the battle that has to be won twice but when in the small hours of the morning Alan returned and crept noiselessly to his room he felt that he had won, that he had put the final seal on the renunciation Nance's words had well-nigh recalled. Still wakeful, Alan started packing. He left out his riding kit.

That day awoke to clouds that lowered and hung about waiting for the fateful hour of seven when they might with due respect to atmospheric tradition start in with an all day rain, but long before the hour struck Alan had foraged for a biscuit and a glass of milk and was mounted and away for a last ride.

Alan rode with the ease of one born to the saddle. There was nothing of the cowboy in his get-up. He used a mere patch of a hunting saddle, fitted like a glove to his horse's back, and rode on the snaffle with a light hand. The curb rein, that last refuge of a poor horseman, hung loose and forgotten. Alan himself was dressed in well-worn whipcord breeches, short coat, soft hat, and close-fitting boots adorned with rowelless spurs. For his health Red Hill had done wonders. His body

was trim, supple, and as vibrant as the young horse under it.

But Alan's thoughts were far from saddles and saddle gear as he walked the restive animal down the dipping slope of Long Lane and with his riding crop steadily discouraged the early morning flies, intent on settling down to the business of life on his mount's arched neck and quivering quarters. He was thinking of Clem. Where could he go to get away from Clem? Not tomorrow, not sometime, but to-day. Where could he go to-day? Once the world had seemed to him a fenceless pasture where it was good to wander, where every undiscovered glade promised fresh morsels to an unwearied palate but now in his mind the whole world had shrunk to the proportions of Red Hill. Where Clem was, there was the whole world. Already he felt the yearning with which his heart must henceforth turn to its sole desire.

He crossed the valley and, as his horse breasted the opposing hill, he thought he heard an echoing hoofbeat behind him. He turned and with one hand resting on the horse's quarter gazed back through the gray light but Long Lane was veiled from view by overhanging trees. As he lifted his hand, its impress, clearly defined as an image, caught his eye. How strange. He had ridden a thousand times and he had never noted such a thing before. It was simple when reduced to physical terms. The horse was warm and moist, the hair cool and dry. His hand pressed the hair down into the moisture. But when he had reasoned out the why and wherefore and ticketed the phenomenon, the

impress still stared back at him. To his mood it seemed an emblem of isolation, a thing cut off, discarded, useless. With a smile of rebuke at his fancies he touched the horse with his crop and gave him his head. The horse sprang forward, cleared the top of the hill and the rhythmic clatter of his hoofs as he dashed along the pebble-strewn road seemed to cleave the still morning in two.

CHAPTER XLI

ALAN did not draw rein until he reached the top of the bluff dividing the valley from West Lake. Then for a moment he sat and stared down the long slope. There was a smell of moisture in the air. The valley, the whole world, was expecting, waiting for rain, and even as he stared the rain came in a fine, veil-like mist that steadied the tones of earth and sky to one even shade of endless gray. Out of the gray came the click of iron on pebble. Alan recognized the quick, springy tread of a climbing horse. He turned and faced Clem. He felt the slow color rising in his cheeks and his hands trembled.

They did not smile at each other; they even forgot to say good-morning. Alan licked his thin lips. They were as dry as ever they had been with fever. "Where's your hat?" he asked.

A flicker of amusement showed in Clem's eyes. She was quite calm and she could see that Alan was not, that he was biting his tongue at the feeble words he had saddled on a heavy moment. "Hats are for sunny days," she said. "I like rain on my head. Have you anything special to do? Don't let me bother you."

"No," stammered Alan, "nothing that can't be put off."

"Do you remember," Clem went on, "years ago I asked you to take me for a ride, and you said not then but sometime? I've never had my ride with you. I want it now."

Her eyes were fixed on his and held him. "I am ready," he said through dry lips.

She turned her horse and he followed. They rode in silence at a walk and then at a trot. Clem turned into a wood-road. Her horse broke into a gallop. She flicked him with her whip and his gathered limbs suddenly stretched out for a free run. The going was soft. Alan had fallen behind. Clots of mossy loam struck him in the face. Swaying branches showered drops of water on him. He lost his hat. Then his lips tightened, his eyes flashed and he began to ride. He was himself again.

He urged his horse forward but he could not get on even terms; Clem held the middle of the narrow track. Suddenly they burst into the broad Low Road. With a terrific clatter of flying stones and slipping, scrambling hoofs they made the turn. Alan rode at last on Clem's quarter. "Clem," he cried, "stop! It is n't fair to the horses."

But Clem only laughed. Her slim body swayed to the bends of the road; her shoulders were braced; she leaned slightly back, steadying her horse with a taut rein. Alan tried to draw even but every time he urged his horse into a spurt Clem's spurted too. Alan grew angry. He watched Clem's whip but it never moved. He settled into the saddle and rode blindly. His horse must catch up or he would kill him. He was gaining.

A moment more at the same pace and he could reach Clem's reins below her horse's neck. Then Clem swerved again into a half hidden wood-road and Alan's horse plunged through the brush, broke out, and followed, a poor second.

Alan's face and hands were badly scratched but he rode on doggedly. It never occurred to him to give up the chase. In the end he would catch up; he knew that, but what puzzled him was what he should do to Clem when he caught her. Any one else, man or woman, he would give a taste of their own riding whip for their own good but not Clem. Alan suddenly knew that there was something in Clem that a man could not break.

The wood-road made a gradual ascent that the willing horses took at a steady, hard gallop. They left the tree-line of the valley below them, scurried across an ancient clearing, pushed through brush and branches, and burst out on to the long, bald back of East Mountain. Then came another clear run over crisp sod dangerously interspersed with wet, slippery stones and hindering boulders.

At the highest point in all the country-side Clem suddenly drew rein and slipped from her horse before Alan could reach her. She stood with one arm across the saddle-horn and waited for him.

Alan threw himself from his horse and rushed up to her. His hands were itching to grip her shoulders and shake her but he held them at his side. "What did you do it for?" he asked with blazing eyes.

Clem looked him over coolly. "Ever run after any one before, Alan?"

"What?" stuttered Alan. He felt foundations slipping from under him. Here was a person who could look Ten Percent Wayne at his best in the eye and never turn a mental hair.

"How do you like it?" continued Clem in an even, firm voice. Then she turned her square back to the saddle and faced him fairly. "I'll tell you what I did it for. All my life I've been running after you. Last night I heard you packing. I knew what you were doing — you were getting ready to go away. Before you went I wanted you to run after me — just once. A sort of consolation prize to pride."

Alan's face hardened. "Stop, Clem. You can't talk like that to me and you can't talk like that to yourself." He looked at Clem and the blood surged into his neck and face. At that moment Clem was beautiful to him beyond the wildest dreams of fair women. She was dressed in a close-fitting long coat that buttoned down the front. Her riding skirt, of the same dark stuff, she had hitched up at one side to a silver hook. From under the raised skirt peeped a straight riding boot and on the heel of the boot was a tiny, right-angle spur. Alan's quick eyes hung on that spur; it explained the lead Clem had held through the headlong ride.

Clem's right arm was still hooked over the double horn of her saddle and her left hand holding a slim riding whip hung at her side. To the velvet lapels of her coat clung little drops of rain. Her hair was braided and firmly tied in a double fold at the back of her neck, but short strands had escaped from durance

and played about her head. Her head, like the velvet lapels, was dusted with little silvery drops of water and little drops of water perched on her long, up-turned lashes. Her cheeks were flushed, her bosom agitated, her lips tremulous. Only her eyes were steady.

Alan took off his coat and threw it over a rock, "Will you please sit down? I must talk to you."

Clem strode to another rock and sat down. "You are absurd. Your coat is as wet as the stones. Put it on." Alan hesitated. "Put your coat on."

Alan obeyed; then he sat down before her but turned his eyes away and gazed rather vacantly over the whole wet world. "If ever two people have known each other without words, Clem, it's you and me. Never mind the grammar. Even unshackled words are a dribbling outlet for a full heart and my heart's as full to-day with things I've never said to you as the clouds are with rain.

"Nature, taken by and large, is a funny outfit and the funniest things in it are the ones that make you want to cry. The world sees a good man, clean and straight, married to a faithless woman and laughs. Men see a pure girl give her all to a cad and they say, 'It's always the rotters that get the pick,' and they laugh too. But down in the bottom of our hearts we know that these things are things for tears."

"Yes, Alan," said Clem as he paused. She was no longer imperious, only attentive with chin in hands and elbows on knees.

"You know me," went on Alan, "but there are things about me that you do not know — things below

you that you have no understanding for, thank God. I don't even know how to picture them to you."

"Yes, Alan," said Clem softly.

Alan picked a bit of huckleberry bush and twisted it nervously in his hands. "First of all I've got to tell you what I thought you knew, that what there is of me is yours over and over again and then I've got to tell you why you can't have it." A light came into Clem's eyes, trembled, flickered and then settled to a steady flame.

"You've seen people smile — every one has a smile of sorts," went on Alan. "Did you ever think that a smile had body and soul? To me it has. It starts out in life like a virgin with a body to keep pure and a soul to guard unstained. There are smiles that illumine a face, that shine with essential purity, that glorify. Nobody has to tell you that they have never pandered to a ribald jest or added cruelty to denial. They are live smiles and they are rare among women and rarer among men. For one such you'll find a thousand living faces with dead smiles — smiles that have scattered their essence like rain on the just and the unjust, that have rolled in filth and wasted their substance on the second best. You'll find them flickering out in the faces of young men and at the last gasp in the faces of lost women whose eyes hold the shadows of unforgotten sins."

"Well?" said Clem.

Alan sighed. "Between the lines of my words you must read for yourself. My smile is dead — I killed it long ago. Yours is alive — alive. You have kept it

pure, guarded its flame and you shall hold it high like a beacon. You are ready to give all and you have all to give. I have nothing but the empty shell. I have kept nothing. I have gained the whole world — and lost it. The little strength left to the pinions of my soul could carry me up to clutch your beacon and drag it down, but Clem — dearest of all women — I love you too much for that. You've got to trust me. The things I know that you do not know shove the duty of denial on to my shoulders. I could give you an empty shell but I won't."

Alan had not looked at Clem. He had talked like one rehearsing a lesson, with his eyes far away in the gray world. He dropped the bit of bush, and his hands, locked about his knees, gripped each other till the knuckles and fingers showed white against the tan of his thin wrists. When he stopped speaking Clem turned curious eyes upon him. "Is that all?" she asked.

Alan sprang up and faced her. "All? All?" he cried. "Isn't it enough?"

Clem rose to her feet. In her uplifted right hand she held her agate-headed riding whip. Alan's eyes fastened on it as she meant them to do. Then with a full, free swing she flung it from her. The whip, weighted by the agate head, described a long curve through the air and plunged into the brush far down the mountain side. "That," said Clem, her eyes flashing into his, "for the beacon. I kept it for you. It was too good for you; you would not take it, so there it goes." Her lip trembled and she snapped her fingers. "It is not worth *that* to me."

"Clem!" cried Alan, protesting.

"Don't speak," said Clem; "you have said what you had to say. Now listen to me. You are blind, Alan, or worse than that, asleep. I'm not a thin-legged elf with skirts bobbing above my knees any more. You can't make me swallow my protests to-day with,—Clem, you must n't this and you must n't that. There's one thing you've closed your eyes on long enough. I'm a woman, Alan, bone, spirit and a great deal of flesh. I love you and you say you love me."

Alan started forward but Clem held him off with a gesture. "What do you think I love in you? The things you have spent? The things you have thrown away? Has a woman ever fallen in love with a man because he was perfect?" Clem made a desponding gesture with both hands as though she sought words that would not come. "Some men clap a wife on to themselves," she went on, "as you clap a lid on to a hot fire. If the fire grows cold quick enough the lid cracks. Some just let the fire burn out and take the dross with it. A woman knows that there is always something left in the man she loves. And even if she did not know it, it would be the same. She would rather give all for nothing than never give at all."

Clem's voice fell into a lower key. "The things you know that I do not know! What a child you are among men. A half-witted woman is born with more knowledge than the wisest of you ever attains and the first thing she learns is that life laughs at knowledge."

Clem stopped speaking and her eyes that had wandered came back to Alan's face. She drew a quiver-

ing breath. Her face had been pale but now the sudden color surged up over her throat and into her cheeks. She put up her hands to her forehead. "Oh," she gasped, "you have driven me too far. I am a mean thing in my own eyes as I am in yours."

At first Alan had stood stunned by the words in which she had poured out her overburdened heart but as she went on pitilessly laying bare her subjection a flame lit up his eyes and fired his blood. Now he sprang forward and dragged her hands from her face. "Mean, Clem? Mean in my eyes?" Then his tongue failed him. He sank to the wet grass at her feet, took her knees in his arms and hid his hot face in her skirt. "My God, my God," he cried. "I am mean but what there is of me has knelt to you by night and worshiped you by day. When you were little you were in my heart and you have grown up in it. When you were little there was room there for other things but now that you have grown up you have filled it — all of it — every nook and cranny."

A tremor went through Clem's body. She rested the fingers of one hand on Alan's head and tried to turn up his face. But he held it close to her knees. "If you want me, Clem, if you want me, then there must be things left — things I have never — could never give — to any one else. But I am ashamed to pour them into your lap — I must pour them at your feet."

"No," said Clem gravely, "I do not want you to pour things at my feet. It's got to be eye to eye or nothing, and if there's any man left in —"

"Clem," broke in Alan, "there is enough man left

in me if you'll only give me time. Time to *groom* him. You can understand that, Clem? You know what grooming and a clean stable will do for a shaggy horse?"

Clem nodded. "How much time do you want?"

Alan hesitated. "A year," he said. "I'll *make* a year do it."

"You can have six months," replied Clem and added with a smile, "That's ten per cent under office estimates."

Then forgetful of hours and meals and the little things in life that do not count when human souls mount to the banquet of the gods, they sat side by side and hand in hand on a big rock and stared with unseeing eyes at the gray world. "With you beside me," said Alan, "all skies are blue and filled with the light of a single, steady star."

Clem did not answer, but in her eyes content and knowledge, tenderness and strength, pleasure and pain played with each other like the lights and dappled shadows under a swaying bough.

CHAPTER XLII

WHEN Clem and Alan reached home long after the lunch hour, they found the Hill athrill with news. Alix had received a cable and had left at once for town. She had gone alone. That could mean but one thing — Gerry was at last coming back.

It was from Barbados that Gerry had cabled. Ever since he had written his short note to Alix, through long doubting weeks at Piranhas and longer days of questioning and hesitation on board the slow freighter that was bearing him home, Gerry had been fighting himself. Only Lieber's sudden death and his burial, to which Gerry had ridden post-haste, had come in between as a solemn truce.

On the freighter he had had time enough and to spare to think. He had spent hours going over the same ground time and time again. For days he sat in his chair on the short bridge-deck, staring out to sea, making over and over the circle of his life from the time he had left home. He remembered sitting thus on the way out. He remembered the turmoil his mind had been in and the apathy that had followed, the long rest at Pernambuco, the trip down the coast and up the river, the glorious misty morning at Piranhas, Margarita, catastrophe, awakening. What did that

awakening stand for? Again he thought, if he could choose — would he wish to be back as he was before — as he was on the way out? A voice within him said “No.”

In those days when once more his thoughts demanded to be seen in their relation to Alix, that steady voice within him was his only comfort. The flood at Fazenda Flores had swept away all that his hands had done but the things that Fazenda Flores had done for him could not be swept away by any material force. They stood and feared nothing — except Alix.

Wherever his mind turned, it came back to Alix and found in her an *impasse*. Alix assumed more and more the portentous attributes of one unattached, sitting in judgment over his acts. His memory of her frailty, of her flower-like detachment from the bones — the skeleton — of life, her artificiality, made her seem ludicrously incongruous in the role of judge. He could not picture her, much less estimate the sentence she would pass. His thoughts led him daily up to that *impasse* and left him. Then came the doubt and the question — why should he lead himself bodily to the *impasse* at all?

He was still fighting this point when he reached Barbados but there an incident befell which brought a new light to his mind and then a new peace to his soul.

He had gone ashore at Bridgetown simply because his whole body, perfectly attuned by three years of long hours of toil, was crying out for more exercise than the narrow decks of the freighter could afford.

When the little group of passengers reached shore,

with the exception of Gerry and an old returning Barbadian, they all turned in the same direction as if by a common impulse.

The Barbadian glanced at Gerry and jerked his head at the disappearing group. "Men of the world in the big sense," he said.

"What do you mean?" asked Gerry.

"Son," said the old Barbadian, who was very tanned and whose kindly eyes blinked through thick glasses, "when a chap tells you he's a man of the world you ask him if he ever had a drink at the Ice House. You don't have to say 'in Bridgetown.' 'Ever have a drink at the Ice House?' Just like that; and if he says, 'No,' you know he meant he was a town rounder when he said he was a man of the world."

Gerry smiled and fell naturally in step with the Barbadian as he moved slowly on.

"Yes," said the old man. "It's a sure test. The man that has n't crooked his elbow at the big, round, deal table in that old ramshackle drink-house, can't say he's really traveled. Long lost brothers and friends have met there and when men that roam the high seas want news of some pal that's disappeared down the highway of the world they drop in at the old Ice House and ask what road he took. It's the halfway house to all the seven seas."

"Have you lost any one?" asked Gerry.

"No, I'm not thirsty for drink just now," said the Barbadian with a smile. "And you?"

"Nor I," said Gerry, laughing. "I'm out to stretch my legs."

"You can't do that here," replied the old man. "You don't know our sun. Come with me." He hailed a ramshackle victoria.

Gerry hesitated. "You must have a home you want to go to and friends to see. Don't worry about me. I'll be careful about the sun."

"Boy," said the Barbadian, "I've got a home and I'm going to see it but there's no reason why you should n't come along. As for friends—the ones I left here won't get up to meet any one till the last trump sounds. Come along. You are the only company and I'm the only host in our party."

They climbed into the rickety cab and the Barbadian gave directions to the driver. The driver answered in the soft guttural of the West Indian black.

Slowly they crawled through the crooked streets of the town. Gerry leaned back and gazed at the freakish buildings. They were all of frame work. Some swelled at the top and Gerry wondered why they did not topple over; some swelled at the bottom and he wondered why these did not cave in.

The Barbadian watched his face. "Funny town, eh?"

Gerry nodded.

Presently they found themselves on a country road. It was so smooth that the weighted carriage pushed the old horses along at an unwonted pace. Little houses—hundreds of them—that looked like big hen-coops lined the road. Suddenly the carriage came to a halt. One of the little houses was trying to straddle the road.

From around it came screams and cries. "Now, then, yo' Gladys, when ah say heft, yo' *heft*."

The driver poured out an angry torrent of words that tried their best to be harsh and failed. From around the obstructing house came an old darky. When his eyes fell on the Barbadian he rushed forward. "Lor, Misteh Malcolm, when did yo' get back?"

"Just now, Charles," said the Barbadian. "What's the matter here?"

The darky's eyes rolled. "Mattah, Misteh Malcolm? Why that ole Cunnel Stewaat he's jes' so natcherly parsonmonious that he requires me to pay rent fo' havin' ma house on his lan' so I says to ole Mammy, we'll jes' move this here residence on to a *gen'leman's* lan', and Misteh Malcolm me'n mammy'n the chile are jes' a-movin' it on to yo' ole cane fiel'."

The Barbadian laughed a little dryly and shrugged his shoulders. The driver got down, protesting, and helped the family carry the house across the road. Then the cab went on and soon turned up an avenue under a fiery canopy of acacia flamboyante.

As they progressed, thick twining growths spangled with brilliant blooms, walled in the avenue. The air grew cool but heavy with scents and the full-flavored spice of a tropical garden under a blazing sun.

The air made Gerry dreamy. He woke with a start when the Barbadian said to the cabman, "This will do. You need n't drive in. Wait here."

The cab stopped. Just ahead was the ruin of a great gate. The two pillars still stood but they were almost entirely hidden by vines. To one of them clung the

rusted vestige of a gate. Beyond the pillars there was a winding way. Once it had been a broad continuation of the avenue, now it was but a tunnel through the densely crowding foliage. Along the center of the tunnel was a narrow path. Even it was overgrown. The Barbadian led Gerry down the path.

They came out under a grove of mighty trees whose dense shade had kept down the undergrowth and beyond the trees Gerry saw a vast, irregular mound of vines with which mingled giant geraniums, climbing fuchsias, honeysuckle and rose. Then he spied a broad flight of marble steps; at one end of them an old moss-grown urn, at the other, its fallen, broken counterpart. Above the mound rose the roof of a house; through the vines, as the two drew nearer, appeared shuttered windows and a door, veiled with creepers.

The Barbadian went up the steps and tore the creepers away from the door. Then he drew from his pocket an enormous key. With a rasp the lock turned and the door opened, letting a bar of light into a wide, cool hall.

Gerry followed the Barbadian through the hall to a broad veranda at the back of the house. A large living-room faced on to the veranda. The Barbadian entered it, opened the French door-windows and, dusting off two lounge chairs, invited Gerry to sit down.

Gerry looked around curiously. The living-room was comfortably furnished. There were one or two excellent rugs on the waxed floor; a great couch, set into a bow-window; lace curtains, creamy with age; a wonderfully carved escritoire in rosewood; a side-

board, round table and chairs of mahogany *that was* almost as dull and black as ebony. Over all *lay a coat* of dust.

The Barbadian walked to the round table *and with* his finger wrote in the dust, then he sat *down in* a worn and comfortable chair, a companion to *Gerry's*. He fell into so deep a reverie that Gerry *thought he* was asleep.

Gerry got up and walked around the room. *His eye* fell on the table. He saw what the Barbadian *had* written; simply the date of the day. But above the freshly written date showed another, filmed over *with* dust, and above that another almost obliterated. Gerry leaned over the table. He could see that a long *succession* of dates had been written into the thick-laid dust. Beginning with the fresh numerals staring up at him they reached back and back through the years till they faded away into a dim past.

Gerry tiptoed out on to the veranda. Before him was a ruined lawn; in its center a cracked, dry, marble fountain. Off to one side was a giant plane tree. From one of its limbs hung two frayed ropes. Against its trunk leaned a weather-beaten swing-board. Under the ropes, a wisp of path still showed, beaten hard in a bygone day by the feet of children. Beyond the lawn stretched wide hummocky cane-fields. They were abandoned save for little patches of cane here and there, bunched up against little hen-coop houses.

"Got a home, boy?"

Gerry turned and found the Barbadian standing beside him. "A home!" he answered, his thoughts fly-

ing to Red Hill, "I should think I have and it's a li—" Gerry caught himself but not in time.

The Barbadian nodded slowly. "I know," he said, "you were going to say it's a live one. Well, as to that, don't you make a mistake. This home is alive too — just exactly as alive as I am, for I'm the last of the Barbados Malcolms.

"Home," he went on, "is n't altogether a matter of cash, comfort and cool drinks. Sometimes it's just a gathering place for memories.

"There was a time when we whites stood fifteen to one over the blacks on this island. Now the tables are turned. A chap that only takes a drink every time he sees a white man would have to go to a mass meeting to get drunk.

"Lately they've been sending out scientific commissions from England to sit like coroners on this mound in the sea. They say they're going to bring the corpse back to life. I've been offered a big price for this old place but I'm not selling."

Gerry looked at the Barbadian's rather shabby clothes. "Why don't you sell if you don't want to work the place? It's worth money. I know enough to tell you that."

The Barbadian rested one hand high on the thick trunk of a wistaria. A slow smile drew the corners of his mouth. "Worth money?" he echoed. "My boy, not every man kills the thing that he loves best. This is my home. You read those dates written in dust and still you thought my home was dead. But it is n't dead. I have n't killed the thing that I love

best. You can get cash, comfort and cool drinks almost anywhere, but I have remembered that memories travel only beaten paths."

Even as Gerry picked his way back to the waiting cab he felt Red Hill reaching out for him, drawing him. And during the long, slow drive to the quay he learned that he had passed the crossroads that had given so long a pause to his troubled soul. The Barbadian had opened his eyes. Doubt left him. There was but one road — the road back — and it was open. He wrote his cable to Alix with a firm hand.

The freighter reached quarantine after a quiet voyage twelve hours ahead of time and just at sundown. A tug hurried down the bay to tell them their berth was not ready. The freighter was forced to anchor at the mouth of the Narrows. Gerry watched the lights spring out from the shadowy shores. They beckoned him to familiar scenes. Staten Island had been to his boyhood an undiscovered land and the scene of his first wanderings. Bayshore he knew through constant passing by. In the sky beyond it, hung the glow of the summer city, here and there pierced with the brighter flame of some grotesque monstrosity.

Up the bay the dark waters forked into two bands that lost themselves in a sea and sky of twinkling lights. He could just determine the sweeping arch of Brooklyn Bridge and the presence of more than one new tower of Babel that broke the ever-changing skyline of his native city and made him feel, by that much, forgotten and an alien. But from all the myriad lesser lights his eyes turned gratefully to the high-held torch of

Liberty. Beneath it, the familiar, tilted diadem, the shadowy folds draping the up-standing pose, the strength and steadfastness and the titanic grandeur of the statue, carried their message to him as never before. It became to him what its creator had conceived, an emblem, and the myriad little waves of the bay, rushing to fling themselves at the feet of the Goddess, became a multitude, eager for attainment, ready for sacrifice.

CHAPTER XLIII

IT was ten o'clock on a morning in early autumn when Gerry finally got free of the freighter and took the ferry for the other side of the river. He had left all his baggage to be delivered at the house later. The morning was clear but sultry. In the city the apathy of summer days had settled down. People glanced at Gerry's heavy tweeds and antiquated hat but they did not smile, for Gerry himself was such a sight as makes men forget clothes. The tan of his lean face, the swing of his big, unpadded shoulders, his clear eyes, carried the thoughts of passers-by away from clothes and city things. They seemed to catch a breath of spicy winds from the worn garments that clung to the stranger's virile body and in his eyes they saw a mirage of far-away places.

As Gerry reached his own house, he was outwardly calm, even deliberate, but inwardly he was fighting down a turmoil of emotions. What was he to find in Alix? Had he anything to give in exchange? Had he too much? He climbed the steps slowly. His hand trembled as he reached out to raise the heavy bronze knocker. Before his fingers could seize it, the door swung softly inward. Old John bowed before him. For a moment Gerry stood dazed. The naturalness of that open door, of the old butler, of the cool shadows

in the old familiar hall, struck straight at his heart with the shrewd poignancy of simple things. Old John raised a smiling face to greet him but down one wrinkled cheek crawled a surprised tear.

Gerry held out his hand. "How do you do, John?"

"I am very well to-day, sir," said John. "Mrs. Gerry is in the library. She told me to telephone to the club and if you were there to say she wished to see you."

Gerry was puzzled. Why should Alix think he would go to the club? He handed the butler his old hat and strode to the library door. The door was closed. He knocked. Somebody said, "Come in." The words were so low he hardly heard them. He opened the door, stepped inside and closed it behind him.

Alix, dressed in a filmy blue and white house-gown, stood in the middle of the room. With one hand up-raised, the other outstretched, she seemed to be poised, equally ready for advance or flight. Her eyes passed swiftly over Gerry's face, swept searching down to his feet and back again to his face. For weeks she had been wondering. Terrible things had come to her mind. Alan and Gerry, with his heartless note, had conspired to mystify, to terrify her. All the joy she had looked forward to in Gerry's home-coming had turned into a bitter pain. They had not known on the Hill how she was suffering. Only Kemp had seemed to understand a little and had brought his drop of comfort to her.

As her eyes searched Gerry the sense of impending

calamity left her. He was well, well as she had never seen him before. Except for that he seemed almost weirdly familiar, as though only a good night's sleep lay between him and the morning of three years ago when he had bullied her until she had fought back and overwhelmed him.

A hundred little differences went to make up this solitary change. The flush of too many drinks had given way to a deep healthy glow, the eyes were deep and grave instead of deep and vacant, the broad shoulders that had taken to hanging were braced in unconscious strength. Every line in the body that she had seen start on the road to grossness had been fined down. The body was no longer a mere abode for a lingering spirit. It had become a mechanism, tuned to expression in action. It was not the body of a time-server. Alan's sole word of comfort came back to her. "I never thought the old Rock would ever loom so big." What force had done this thing to Gerry? She felt a pang, half envy, half remorse. If she had been wise, less than that, if she had been merely *sage*, could she not have saved Gerry to himself and spared her faith the test of the three long years lost out of their youth?

Gerry stood erect by the door, one hand still holding the knob. Why was he waiting? Alix's raised hand went slowly out to him in welcome but he did not move. She smiled at him but his eyes remained steadfast and grave. A lump rose in Alix's throat and then, as pride came to her aid, a flare of color showed in her cheeks. Her lips opened. What could she say to hurt

him enough, to pay him back for this added, unjust rebuff? She knew so little about this new Gerry. How could she wound him?

And then he spoke. "Will you please sit down? There are things I must tell you."

Gerry had blundered on magic words. There is no moment so emotionally tense that a true woman will not drop the immediate issue to sit down and listen to the untold things she has wanted to hear. Alix was a true woman. The flare died out of her cheeks. She sank into a chair beside the dully shining mahogany table and with a nod of her golden head motioned Gerry to a seat opposite her. She watched the easy swing of his body as he moved across the room. Gerry's mind was in sore conflict, but a body in perfect health has a way of taking care of itself.

Gerry sat down and gripped the edge of the table with outstretched hands. He looked steadily into Alix' eyes. The moment he had foreseen had come. Alix sat in judgment. She planted her bare elbows on the table, laid one hand, palm down on the other and on them both rested her cheek. Her head with its heavy crown of hair was thus to one side but also tilted slightly forward. That slight forward tilt gave strength to the pose and intensity. A curious, measuring look came into Alix's eyes. She was silent and she was waiting.

Gerry dropped his eyes to the table and began to talk. "The things I have got to tell you," he said, "begin with that day — our last day. I went out and walked for hours and realized that I had been

rough and unjust and to blame. I came over to the Avenue and was standing looking at some flowers when you passed. I saw you in the plate-glass of the window. I turned around to make sure. I recognized your trunk. I followed you to the station. I saw Alan signal to you. I saw you get into the train."

Gerry stopped. His premise was finished and he found that he had no tongue to tell the things he had thought — the long argument of the soul. He realized that all that must be left out. He must confine himself to mere physical facts, let them troop up in the order in which they had come upon him and file naked before Alix. She must dress them as she saw fit, as her sympathies and her justice directed. He would give her but the ground-work, plain simple words such as he could command, telling the events that had come upon him and how he had met them.

Of the trip out he had nothing to say but of Pernambuco he told her in detail. Somehow it seemed the least he could do for the filthy and beautiful city that had given him an unquestioning asylum. He told her of the quay, the Lingueta, with its line of tall, stained houses, its vast plane trees and its cobbled esplanade, the stage where the city's life was in perpetual review. His words came slowly but they left nothing out. Unconsciously he created an atmosphere. A light of interest burned in Alix's eyes. She saw the changing scene. It charmed her to restfulness as it had Gerry.

She smelt the stacks of pineapples, the heaped-up mangoes, the frying fish, and through his eyes she saw the blue skies dotted with white, still clouds and

glimpsed the secret, high-walled gardens with their flaring hibiscus, trailing fuchsias, fantastic garden cockscombs and dark-domed mango and jack trees. She sat with Gerry beside the wreck of a consul and, later, on the long slim coasting craft she listened with him to the creak of straining masts and stays and to the lap of hurrying waters. She followed him up the San Francisco, felt his impatience with Penedo, took the little stern-wheeler and learned the fascination of a river with endless, undiscovered turns. They came to Piranhas. Here she felt herself on familiar ground. Letters from the consul's envoy had made this place hers. Unconsciously she nodded as Gerry described the tiers of houses, the twisted, climbing streets, the miserable little inn.

Gerry told of the happy days of ponderous canoeing and of the unvarying strings of fish. He lingered over those days. Thus far he had brought Alix with him. He felt it. Now he came to the morning when he must leave her behind. He told her of the glorious break of that day, of the sun fighting through swirling mists. She saw him standing stripped on the sandspit. She saw the canoe nosing heavily against the shore and his pajamas tossed carelessly across a thwart. She knew that she had come to the moment of revelation. She breathed softly lest she should lose a word for Gerry was speaking very low. Then he showed her Margarita, Margarita as he had first seen her, kissing and kissed by dawn.

A hard light came into Alix's eyes. Gerry felt himself suddenly alone. He went doggedly on. He told

of the chase and the capture, of how he and the girl had seen the canoe drift out into the clutch of the eddy and swirl out into the river and away. He told her of how they laughed and Alix shrank. Gerry paused, his brow puckered. He wished he could tell in words the battle of his spirit, the utter ruin of his downfall. He could not and instead he sighed.

There was something in that sigh so eloquent of defeated expression that it succeeded where words might have failed. It called to Alix with the strong call of helpless things. It drew back her mind to Gerry. With him and the girl she threaded the path to Fazenda Flores. Its ruin sprang upon her through his eyes. With him she discovered the traces of an ancient ditch, with him and the old darky she dug along that line through long, hot months. She met Father Mathias and found no flaw in his logic, she grew to know Lieber as the tale went on and finally to love him because of all things Lieber seemed to need love — somebody else's love — most. She amused herself with Kemp and his drawl. She tried to keep her thoughts away from Margarita and at the coming of Margarita's boy, she winced.

As he finished telling of the coming of the Man, Gerry stopped short. The thought came to him with tremendous force that Alix too had gone through that for him. The impulse to get up and throw himself before her and on his knees to thank her almost tore him from his seat but he fought it down. He hurried on with his story. He told of the coming of Alan and of the revelation he had brought. And then in a choked voice and only because he had set himself to tell the

whole truth he pictured the flood, the death of True Blue, and the overwhelming by the waters before his very eyes of Margarita and the Man. Then he arose and with hands braced on the table leaned towards Alix. "I have told you all this so that perhaps you may understand what I am going to tell you now. If the flood had not come — if Margarita and the Man had lived — I would not have come back."

Alix sat very still and studied Gerry's face. He had finished the task he had set himself to do and he was suddenly very tired. His eyes dropped as though from their own weight and then he raised them again to her inscrutable face.

"Well?" he asked after a long pause.

"Well?" replied Alix.

Gerry's stalwart figure drooped. "It is quite just," he said, "after all that, that you should not want me. I have spent the last weeks making myself ready for that. You waited for me; I did n't wait for you. If you do not want me, I will go away."

Alix rose slowly to her feet. She looked very slim and tall in her clinging gown. To Gerry she looked very cold. "Before you go," she said, "there is just one thing. I wish you would kiss me — once."

Gerry's body straightened and stiffened. He stared at her grave face with wondering eyes. Then he felt a strange tingling ripple through his blood and before he knew what he did he had swept her from her feet, crushed her to him, brushed the crown of hair back from her brow and kissed her eyes, her mouth, her throat. He was rough with her. He was bruising her body,

her lips, but Alix clung to him and laughed. Then suddenly all her slim body relaxed and slipped through his arms to a little white heap on the floor. She began to sob. Gerry stooped down, picked her up tenderly and laid her on the great leathern couch. He knelt beside her. On one arm he pillowed her head, with the other hand he sought hers. "Please, Alix," he begged, "please don't cry."

"I'm not crying," sobbed Alix, "I'm laughing."

Gerry smiled and waited. Soon Alix became quiet. Her eyes closed. She drew a long, quivering breath and then she opened her eyes again and her lips broke into the old dear smile, the smile of an opening flower. "I am tired — tired," she said, "but I believe I'm almost hungrier than I am tired."

"I'm glad you said it first," replied Gerry giving serious thought to the fact that he was faint with hunger himself. "Ever since some funny Johnny wrote, 'Feed the brute,' we men have been shy about echoing our stomachs. It's four o'clock. Hours after lunch time."

"Really?" said Alix, nestling down closer to his arm and letting her smiling eyes wander over him. "How well this suit fits you. There's something about it — It is n't, is it?"

Gerry nodded. "Same old suit. By the way, when I came in John said you told him to telephone to the club and say you wished to see me. What made you think I would go to the club first?"

Alix looked puzzled. "I did n't. I did n't think you would go to the club and I did n't tell John to

telephone." She paused, still puzzling, then her face cleared. "Why — poor old John — he's getting very old, you know, Gerry. That was three years ago I told him to telephone — the day you never came back. It must have been the suit. He saw you standing there in the same suit and three years became as one day to the old fellow."

Gerry sighed. "Alix, do you want those three years to become as a day to us?"

Alix shook her head slowly from side to side. "No, dear, I don't. They have given me — given us both — far more than they took away." She put her bare arms around his neck, drew him down and kissed him. "You do not know yet all that they have given you. You think you have come back and found me, a frittering butterfly in a great empty house. But you've found only my abandoned cocoon. I'm not here at all. I've packed myself into the dearest little bundle of pink fat, yellow curls and chubby legs, and left the bundle on Red Hill."

Gerry nodded but he was grave and silent. Not in a day nor a month could he altogether forget the Man.

CHAPTER XLIV

GERRY had always been quiet but during the long drive from the station to The Firs, his silence amounted to a penetrating stillness. Alix felt it but it did not depress her; she knew herself to be in the presence of a communion. Gerry was devoting the hour of his return to the scenes of his boyhood to a silent consecration. These cool valleys and hollows; the Low Road, with its purling accompaniment of hidden waters; the embowered still nave of Long Lane, were as the ancestral halls of the Lansings. It was right that he should do homage to the memories they evoked.

To his mother Gerry made no explanations. He knew that to her it was enough that her boy had come back. When Mrs. Lansing released him, Alix caught his hand and led him up to the nursery. Together they looked down upon their sleeping child.

Gerry, Junior, was fat to the verge of a split. His curly tow head was tousled and on his brow a slight perspiration testified to the labor of sound sleep. His arms were outstretched. His legs had kinks at the knees, they were so chubby. His petulant little mouth was half open, disclosing tiny teeth.

"Is n't he a beauty?" asked Alix a little loudly, wishing he would awaken.

Gerry nodded. With his eyes still on the child he put his arm around Alix and drew her to him. What Margarita had done for him, Alix had done. As he felt her frail body quivering in his embrace, as he looked back and measured the sacrifice by what the awful night of the coming of the Man had taught him, he was overwhelmed by a new humility. He turned Alix's face up to his. His lips moved in an effort to thank her but words failed him. Alix understood. She lifted her arms around his neck and drew his head down. He held her body very close as he kissed her, softly, adoringly. Alix hid her face against his shoulder for a moment and then threw back her head and shook the tears from her eyelashes. She smiled through wet eyes. "I am afraid he's not quite perfect—inside. Such a temper, Gerry. I'm afraid he'll grow up into a man about town and awfully wild." She turned grave eyes on Gerry, Junior, and her brows puckered. "What do you think?"

Gerry smiled. "From the looks of him I predict he gets his letter in Freshman year—center on the football team."

"Yes, perhaps," said Alix thoughtfully. "Everybody calls him Fatty already."

It was from Alan that Gerry learned that Kemp was still in town closing up his connection with the orchid firm. Gerry wired him, begging him to come to The Firs for a few days before he went West. Alix had told of Kemp's word of comfort.

After the first excitement of getting home was over Gerry found himself restless with the same restlessness

that had attacked him during the days at Piranhas. He tried for a solution in the same way. Day after day, long before the rest of the Hill was awake, he was off for a ten mile walk.

At first it was with head dropped and eyes on the ground that he plowed his way through a dew-soaked world, but there came a time when he walked with head thrown back, full lungs and level eyes.

Then Kemp arrived. Gerry tried to get him to join him in his walks but Kemp shook his head sadly.

"Ef yo' can't let me have a hoss, Mr. Lansing," he said, "I'll ride the cow."

Gerry laughed. They saddled the horses themselves and started out. On the top of old Bald Head Gerry dismounted and sat down on a rock. Kemp followed suit.

"Kemp," said Gerry, "I want to thank you for the things you said to my wife — Alix."

Kemp flushed and waved a deprecating hand.

"You saw things straight," went on Gerry, "and I want to thank you, too, for letting me hog-tie myself."

"I ain't curious about that, Mr. Lansing," said Kemp, "so much 's about what you're goin' to do when yo' untie yo'seff."

"Well," said Gerry, "I've thought that out too. For a while it used to break my heart to think about Fazenda Flores but it came to me the other day that what there is of me that amounts to anything is just Fazenda Flores.

"When a man learns to eat work just like he does food because he's hungry for it, there's bound to be

a place for him anywhere. It has struck me there are a lot of fields around here, some of them mine, that are about ready for resurrection, and resurrection is my job.

"I don't know exactly how I'm going to start but it may be planting potatoes. You can begin a resurrection with any one of a number of simple things. It does n't matter much which one you pick on as long as you start right down at the bottom and spread yourself in the subsoil of things. Everything that grows starts down deep except your orchids and they are parasites —"

"Easy on orchids," interjected Kemp.

"Sorry, Kemp. Orchids are ornamental but excepting your favorites they're not even beautiful. Look at a *Cypripedium Vexillarium* —"

"Hybrid," grunted Kemp.

"A man in his D. T.'s could n't beat it for gorgeous horror," finished Gerry. "But that's neither here nor there. What I'm driving at is this. If I had never been tossed over the home fence I would have lived and died an ornamental citizen with the girth of a beer barrel. But now my eyes are a bit open and I can see that the simple things of life are the big things. Growth from the roots is the strength of a man and of his people. I've come home in more senses than one. I'm going to send down my roots right here."

Kemp had been whittling. When Gerry had finished he pocketed his knife and gazed thoughtfully down the valley. "It seems to me, Mr. Lansing, that you'nd me have been travelin' diff'rent trails but come together

at the same gap. You remember 'The Pu'ple City'?"

Gerry nodded.

"Wal, seems to me thet 'ceptin' in a man's own mind the' ain't no pu'ple cities. What a man's got to find ain't pu'ple cities but the power to see one *when he's* got it. You had yourn right here in this valley an' yon side on Red Hill. You grewed up in it but *you* never seen it — not till you learned how. What *you* been sayin' about the simple things of life — the things thet is at the bottom — has he'ped my seein' parts a powerful lot. I knowed before I come to Red Hill that I was goin' out West to stay but I did n't rightly know why. Now ef you ask me what I know I can tell you I know consid'able.

"Out in Noo Mexico they's a ranch in the fork of Big and Little Creek that's the greenest patch in the shadow of White Mountain. It's mine and it's got a three-room shack on it that could grow if need was. I know a girl that's been holdin' a four-flush against an orchid's weak pair till she's jest about sick of the game, but she's drawed and filled on the last hand though she hain't had a chanst to look at her cards yet.

"For some while the's been a pu'ple light hangin' over Big and Little Creek an' I reckon I'll be able to see it plainer an' plainer the nigher I get to it an' if the girl will he'p me I reckon that in a small way we'll soon be growin' a pu'ple city that will feed from yo' hand. Ef ever you feel the need of some bran' new air, Mr. Lansing, you come out to Big and Little. There won't be much besides air but it'll be fresh made on White Mountain an' you can smell it comin' down

through the pines an' see it playin' with the leaves on the cottonwoods an' plowin' through the tops of the sorghum."

They sat for some time in silence then Gerry said, "I've been calling you 'Kemp' since I first saw you but you still hang on to the 'mister' when you talk to me. Cut it out, Kemp."

Kemp flushed slightly. "Some things is fittin' an' some ain't," he said, "an' we can't always rightly say why. Some folks is governed by conscience but most by pride. It's goin' to be 'Kemp' and 'Mister Lansing' to the end of the chapter, Mr. Lansing, an' no friendship lost either. Shake."

They shook hands solemnly, mounted and started back to Red Hill. Gerry had found the key to Kemp's strength. It was the key to all strength. Kemp belonged on the Hill, and with the people of true blood anywhere, not only because he was himself always but because he defended what he could hold and no more. He was a definition for independence.

CHAPTER XLV

IT was late afternoon of a day in the Gorgeous Month. A shower had fallen on Red Hill and after it had come the sun. Wisps of mare's-tail cloud hurried across the clean-washed heavens as though they were ashamed to be caught in their ragged clothes under a blue sky. Downy-topped masses of cumulus poked drowsy heads over the horizon and watched them run. Out of the dome of heaven filtered a single trill of song.

The Hill was very still but presently from far away on the West Lake Road came the whinny of a horse; a little later, a little nearer, a peal of laughter; then the sound of wheels and chattering voices. A wagonette, two spring wagons and a pony cart burst from Long Lane and wheeled right and left. They were full of grown-ups turned young for a day and youths that thought they would be young forever.

The wagonette, swinging down the road toward Maple House, suddenly swerved and plowed through the tall grass. Alan and Clem on the end seats were almost thrown out. Alan looked back at the road and stared. A fat donkey had claimed the right of way and held it. Several lengths of legs stuck out from her bulging sides. Behind her hurried a panting nurse.

Alan turned to Clem. "Do donkeys never die?"

"Oh! I hope not," said Clem gravely. "You change them. We changed ours while you were away."

"So she has been changed," said Alan. "Well, that's something."

"Silly," said Clem, "you've been seeing that donkey every day for weeks."

"No," said Alan, "this is the first time I've really seen her."

The sun took a last long look at Red Hill and dropped out of sight. Then, as though he would come back and look again, he sent up a broad afterglow that climbed and climbed till the tip of the very clouds that peeped over East Mountain were tinged with the rosy light.

From an open up-stairs window came Clem's soft voice. "Yes, dears, pink night-caps. Those big sleepy clouds are putting them on because *they* are just *glad* to go to bed."

"I want a pink night-cap."

"Why, darling, night-caps are only for white-headed people and white-headed clouds. Just wait until you're white-headed. Now climb into bed and I'll tell —"

Beyond the mountain-ash thicket a love-sick Bob-White kept saying "Good-night — Good-night," to his mate. She answered sleepily.

From Maple House, The Firs, and far down the road, from Elm House warm lights flashed out and settled down into a steady glow. A burst of young voices swept into the night and died away, followed into the silence by soft laughter. From The Firs came the last angry wail of the fat young god, choked off in mid-flight by the soft hand of sleep. Then the scur-

rying of many feet along the dusty road, silence, and last of all, the trailing whistle of a boy signaling good-night — sound saying good-by to a happy day.

Hours passed before the moon popped into the sky, hurrying just at first as though she knew she were forty minutes late again. One by one lights went out. Other lights gleamed from upper windows; then they, in turn, went out. Red Hill had gone to bed.

From Maple House Alan slipped out to smoke a last cigar. He hesitated a moment and then strode through the long grass laden with seed and just decking itself with dewy jewels for the night. He crossed to the old church. The door was open. He entered and climbed the crumbling stairs to the belfry. He jumped into one of the arches and sat down, his legs dangling.

His eyes wandered slowly over the familiar scene. From behind their trees Maple House, The Firs and Elm House blinked up at him dreamily. Before them ran the ribbon of road, white under moonlight, dipping at each end into the wide world. Up and down the road before The Firs, paced two figures — Gerry and Alix. Gerry's arm was around her. Long black shadows, all pointing to the west, like fallen silhouettes cut the moonlight. Above them, the autumn-painted trees gave out a golden echo of light.

Alan drew a great, quivering breath. "My boy, you have been far, far away," J. Y. had said and he had answered, "Yes, but I have come back." But it was only now, to-night, that he had really come back.

Alan's wandering eyes settled on Maple House.

"Even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings," he whispered.

And then the peace of home descended upon him. On his scarred spirit he felt the touch of the healing hands of home. Its sweetness and its power, its love everlasting demanding love forever, knocked at his waking heart and found the door open. Far, far had he wandered in the world of mind and the world of men, but in the end he had come back like a Wayne to the eternal mother of the Waynes. To-night he knew that his drifting soul had dropped anchor at last.

“Seer, Behold the picture.”

“My son, there is that which bounds and is unbounded, that measures and is unmeasured, that limits apparition and delimits occultation, that divides but is undivided. Thou hast stood on the place where thy heart is — and drawn a circle.”

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